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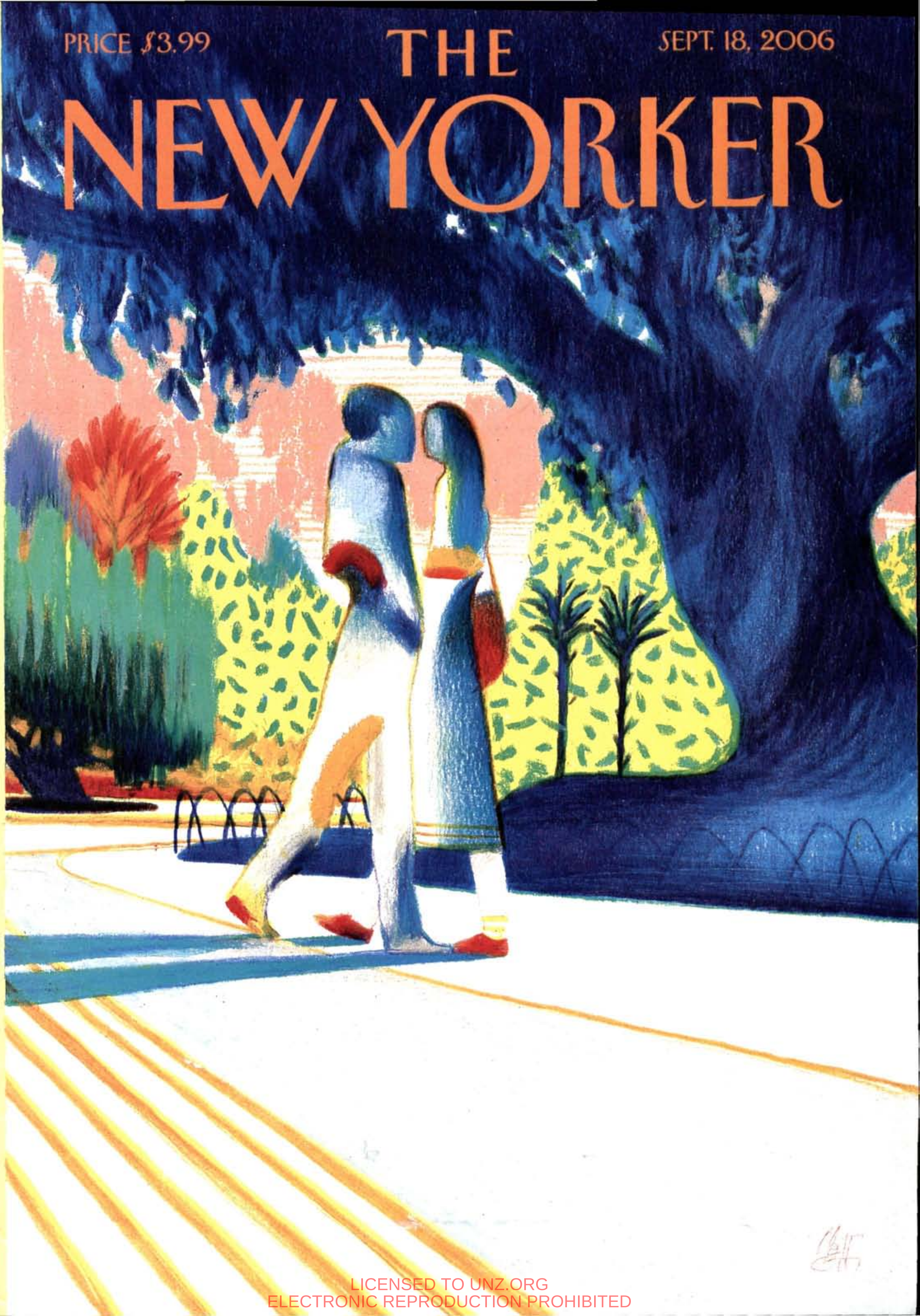
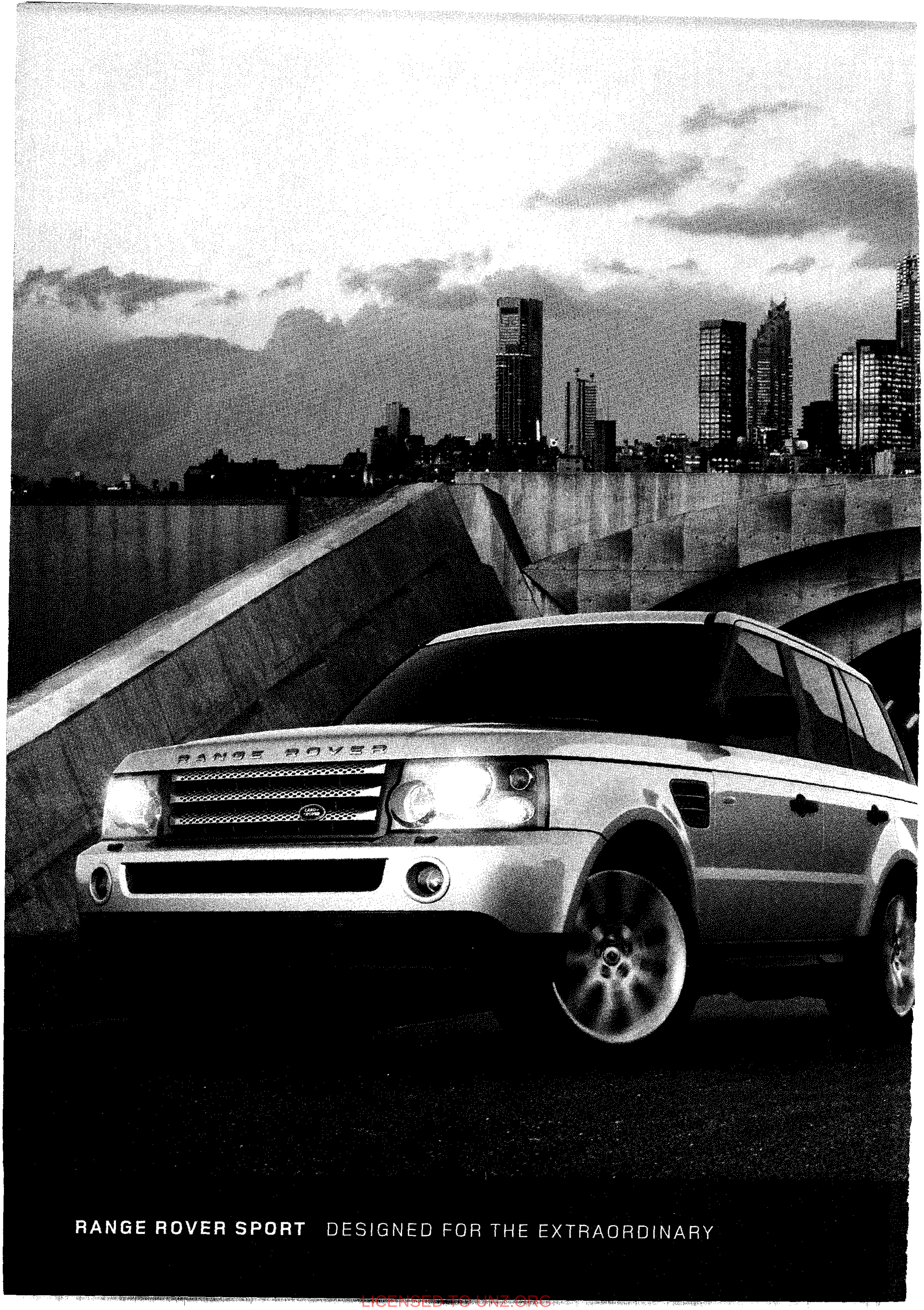
THE NEW YORKER

SEPT. 18, 2006

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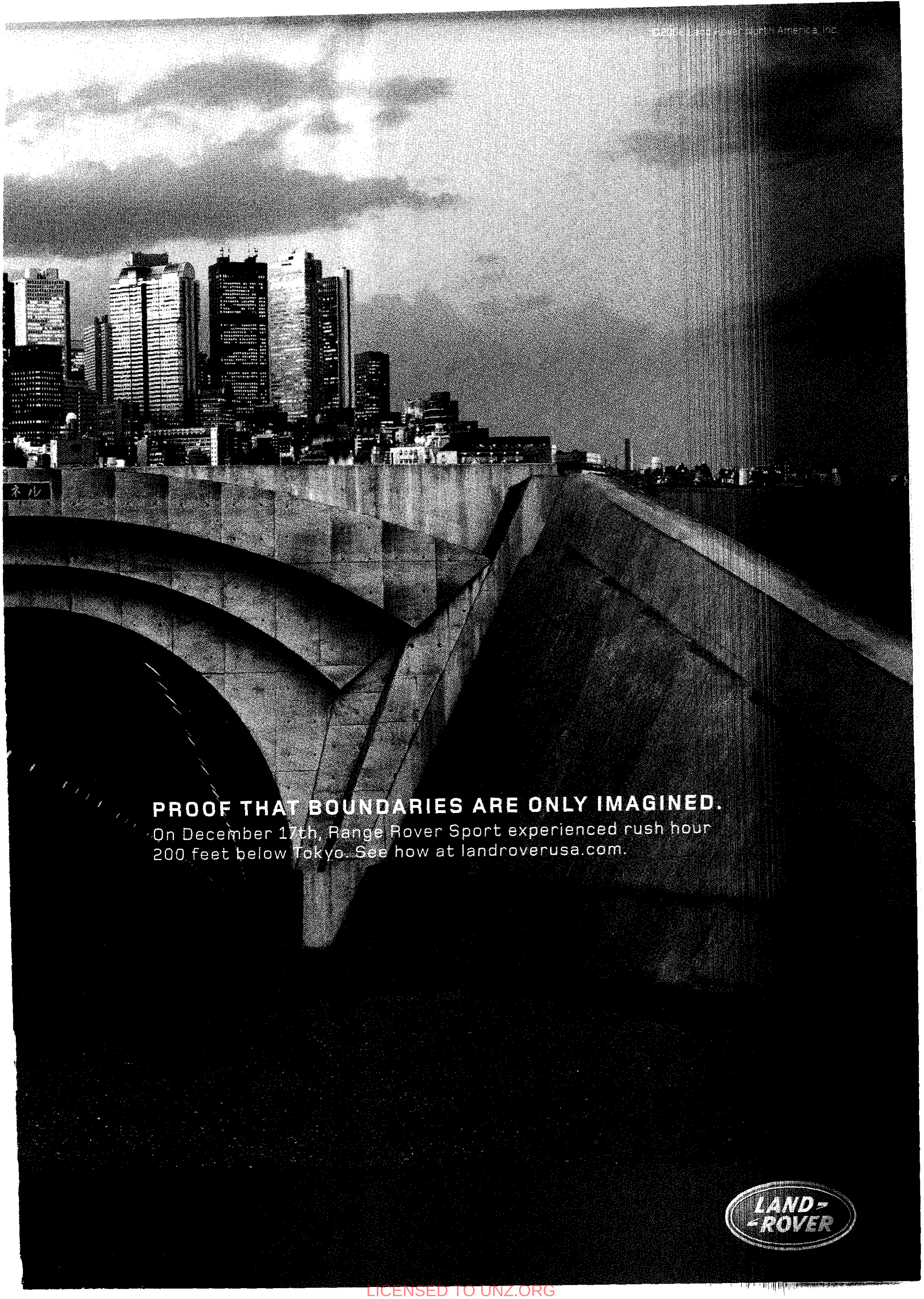
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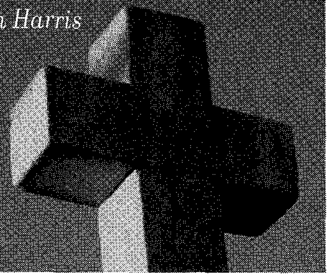
—Sam Harris



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THE NEW YORKER

SEPTEMBER 18, 2006

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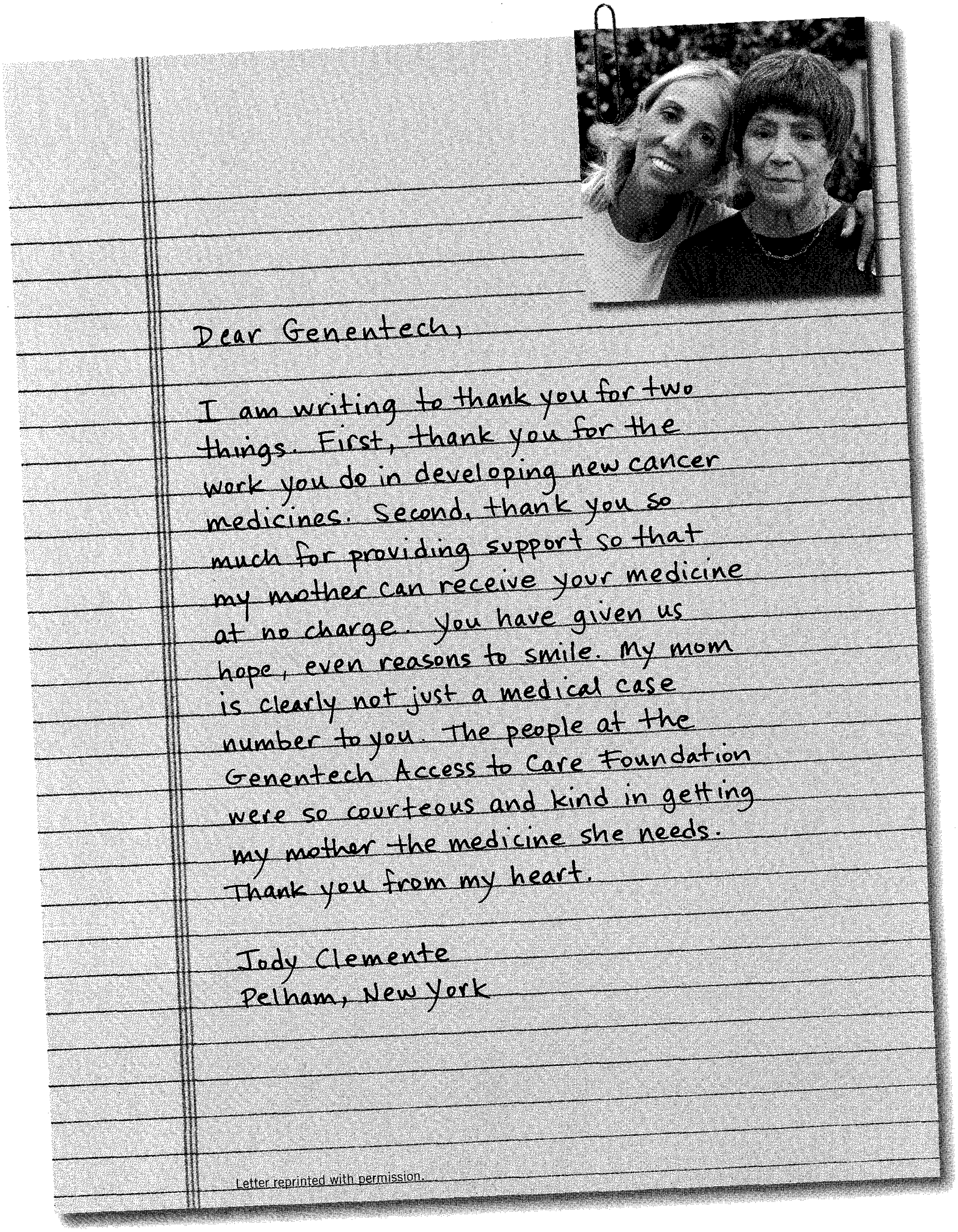

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Jody Clemente
Pelham, New York

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How many corks in the barrel? Send us your best guess, and you could win one of 5 prizes of $1,000, or one of 25 prizes of a Rabbit Corkscrew – so durable it's backed by a 10-Year Warranty.

This contest is for fun but also makes a point: When it comes to corkscrews, the proof is in the pulling.

TO ENTER: Send your guess with return address to: Rabbit Contest, Metrokane, 150 East 58th Street, New York, NY 10155. Or enter at metrokane.com. No purchase necessary. Only one guess per household. Closest 5 guesses win $1,000. Next closest 25 guesses win a Rabbit Corkscrew. Contest ends January 1, 2007.

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CONTRIBUTORS

John Cassidy ("Mind Games," p. 30) writes about economics and business for the magazine. He has been a staff writer since 1995.

David Sedaris ("In the Waiting Room," p. 38) has contributed to the magazine since 1995. He is the author of several books of essays, including "Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim."

Miranda July (Fiction, p. 68) has a collection of short stories, "No One Belongs Here More Than You," coming out next spring.

Tad Friend (On Television, p. 78) has been a staff writer since 1998.

Roz Chast (Sketchbook, p. 59) has a book of cartoons, "Theories of Everything," coming out in October.

Elise Partridge (Poem, p. 71) is the author of "Fielder's Choice," a book of poems. Her second collection, "Chameleon Hours," will be out next year.

John Updike (Books, p. 86) is a regular contributor of fiction, poetry, and criticism. His new novel, "Terrorist," was published in June.

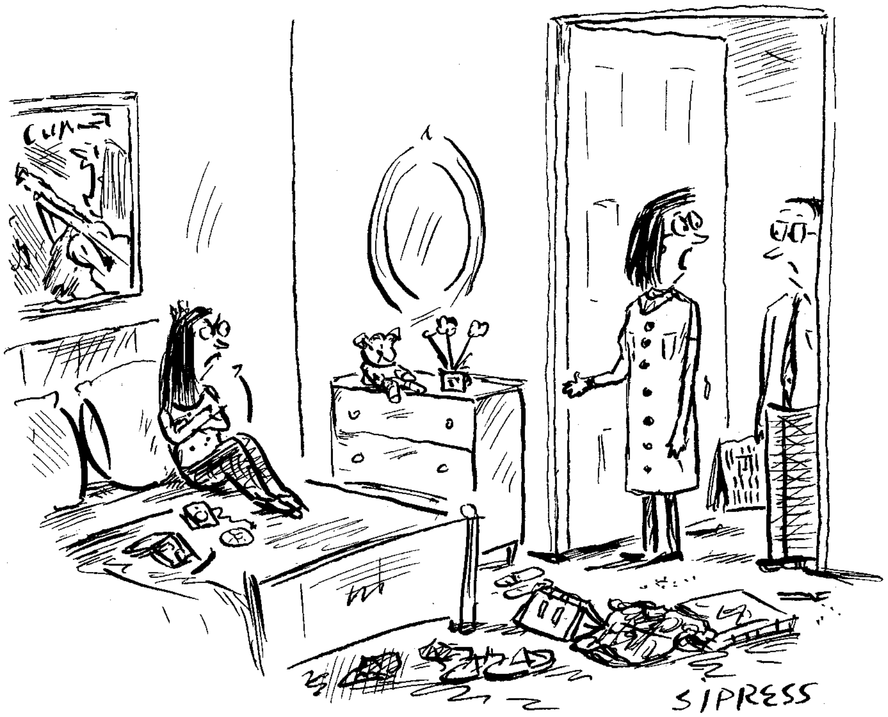
Ian Buruma (A Critic at Large, p. 81) is Henry R. Luce Professor at Bard College. His latest book, "Murder in Amsterdam," came out this month.

Richard Wilbur (Poem, p. 55) received the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize this year. He is the author of, most recently, "Collected Poems: 1943-2004."

Art Spiegelman (Comic Strip, p. 51) is the editor, with Françoise Mouly, of "Big Fat Little Lit," an anthology of comics for kids, which was published this month.

Lauren MacIntyre (The Talk of the Town, p. 27) is a member of the magazine's editorial staff.

David Denby (The Current Cinema, p. 90) is a film critic for the magazine. ♦



"I've just been called a 'materno-fascist.'"

THE MAIL

BRECHT, IN TRANSLATION

Hilton Als, in reviewing the Public Theatre's production of "Mother Courage and Her Children," writes that Tony Kushner "has strained the lumps from the standard 1955 translation, by Eric Bentley" (The Theatre, September 4th). Actually, no standard Bentley translation exists. I began translating "Mother Courage" when I was an assistant to Bertolt Brecht on his Munich production of the play in 1950. Since that time, I have published several translations of it, and Als quotes from the earliest and rawest. In later versions, I tried to strain out what some people would see as lumps in that script, including the lines Als quotes, in which Mother Courage warns her daughter about men. These lines appear, amended and shortened, in, for example, the Eric Bentley/Darius Milhaud version of "Mother Courage," published by Grove Press in 1961, and produced in the nineteen-nineties by the Jean Cocteau Repertory.

Eric Bentley
New York City

SHOPPING FOR SURFBOARDS

William Finnegan laments what he sees as the death of surfboard-design innovation from traditional shapers—wrought not so much by the sudden closure of Clark Foam as by the invasion of mass-produced surfboards, like the Surftech epoxy one he calls a "weird molded-plastic contraption"—even as he complains about his fruitless ten-year effort to have one of his favorite boards re-created ("Blank Monday," August 21st). Yet it is next-generation companies like Surftech that can accurately reproduce the shapes surfers adore, while allowing individual shapers the time and resources to help the sport evolve through innovation. Most surfers don't need a handmade board from a master shaper. When you buy something like a Surftech board, what you're actually getting is a precision-cut shape based on a proven design by an accomplished shaper, who can then devote his time to creating better boards for the professionals. Since it is practically impossible for a human shaper and a human glasser to turn out the same magic twice, it's a relief, after many disappointments, to be able to buy off the rack and know that your new board will ride exactly as your old one did.

Sam Wolanyk
San Diego, Calif.

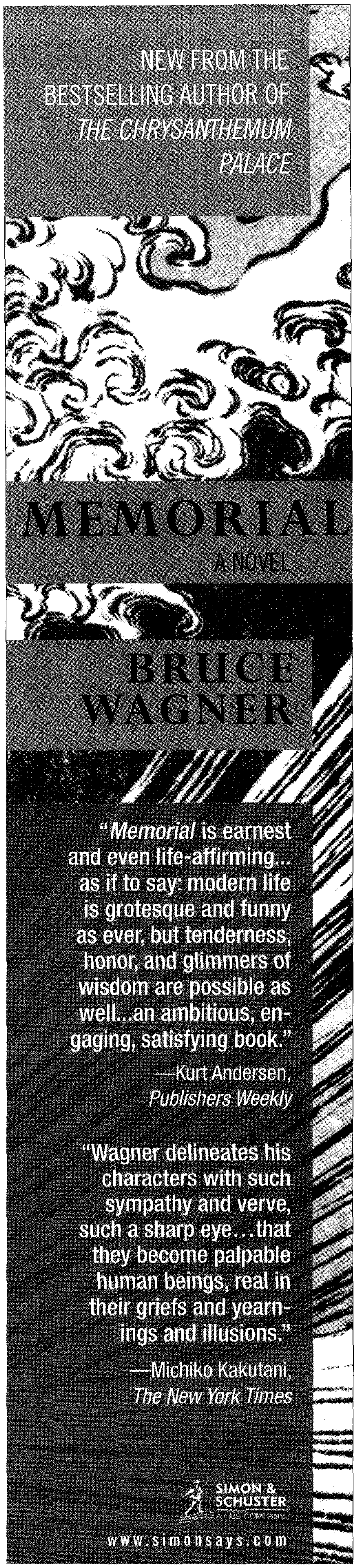
RATING THE M.P.A.A.

Anthony Lane, in his thoughtful review of my movie "This Film Is Not Yet Rated," which investigates the workings of the highly secretive Motion Picture Association of America, comments that the film is overly focussed "on the pedantries of NC-17, however laughable they are" (The Current Cinema, August 28th). While they are indeed laughable, the censorship of films with adult sexuality by the M.P.A.A. has serious consequences for society, both culturally and politically. In an effort to avoid the NC-17 stigma, directors are compelled to deliver R-rated films, dramatically restricting the exploration of sexuality in American cinema. If that same kind of censorship were applied to literature or art, many classic works would never have been created or would have been substantially altered. Equally significant, films with scenes of gay sex receive much more restrictive ratings than films with similarly shot scenes of straight sex. If one believes that film has the power to affect people's attitudes, then certainly this homophobic bias, which has been a part of the ratings system since it was founded, in 1968, has contributed substantially to our society's continuing anti-gay hysteria.

Kirby Dick
Los Angeles, Calif.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.



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—Kurt Andersen, *Publishers Weekly*

"Wagner delineates his characters with such sympathy and verve, such a sharp eye…that they become palpable human beings, real in their griefs and yearnings and illusions."
—Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

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"Madama Butterfly" will open the Metropolitan Opera's season. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
17	18	19	13	14	15	16

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
COUNTRY LIVING

Roundabout Theatre Company continues its tradition of reviving the work of George Bernard Shaw with "Heartbreak House." Philip Bosco and Swoosie Kurtz star in the drama, about star-crossed bohemians living in the English countryside on the brink of the First World War. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
BRIMFUL OF ASHA

Many singers inspire admiration, but few inspire obsession. Asha Puthli, who began her career as a jazz vocalist with Ornette Coleman and evolved into a funk diva, is one of those singers. Her stunning vocal range and idiosyncratic phrasing helped make songs like "Right Down Here" and "Space Talk" cult favorites; she'll demonstrate why at Joe's Pub this week. (See page 9.)

ART
EYE TO THE FUTURE

The Paris gallerist Ambroise Vollard (1867-1939) had a prescient sense of the new direction art was taking at the turn of the twentieth century, fostering the early careers of Matisse, Cézanne, van Gogh, and many others; among those who painted his portrait were Renoir, Rouault, Bonnard, and Picasso. An exhibit at the Met traces his influence through the work that attracted his extraordinary eye. (See page 10.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
ORPHEUS ASCENDING

The conductorless chamber orchestra Orpheus, always at its best when collaborating with a charismatic soloist, opens the season at the Metropolitan Museum with a Baroque concert featuring the Dutch violinist Janine Jansen. (See page 14.)

MOVIES
INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH

Throughout the twentieth century, countless industrial and educational films were made, used, and thrown out, only to fall into the hands of a few farsighted collectors. Anthology Film Archives offers a weekend of found footage, including reels rescued from the San Francisco School of Podiatry, instructional science films, and cautionary tales about venereal disease. (See page 18.)

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

BOOK 'EM

A mug shot is a portrait that no one chooses to have taken. Its intent is not to flatter or illuminate but to record and identify, in full face and in profile, a person under arrest. Like a butterfly pinned to cotton, the accused becomes a specimen. Yet if mug shots are concerned only with cold, hard facts, the circumstances under which they were made can't help but inflect them with all sorts of untoward and bottled-up emotions. Many of the more than two hundred subjects of "Least Wanted: A Century of American Mugshots," which opens this week at the Steven Kasher gallery, look deliberately blank and affectless—the model for much contemporary portraiture, from Andy Warhol to Thomas Ruff. But others are defiant, dazed, amused, bored, furious, frightened, contemptuous, devastated, or beaten (some literally). And it should come as no surprise that, though there are plenty of creeps here, a lot of these men and women exude a noir glamour that Jean Genet identified instinctively: "I recognize in thieves, traitors and murderers, in the ruthless and the cunning, a deep beauty—a sunken beauty."

FROM "LEAST WANTED: A CENTURY OF AMERICAN MUGSHOTS"

—*Vince Aletti*

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ASYLUM: THE STRANGE CASE OF MARY LINCOLN
York Theatre Company presents the world première of a musical about the life of Mary Todd Lincoln a decade after her husband's assassination. In previews. Opens Sept. 14. (619 Lexington Ave. 212-868-4444.)

BIRTH AND AFTER BIRTH
Atlantic Theatre Company presents the New York première of Tina Howe's comedy about overachieving parents trying to impress a childless anthropologist couple with their four-year-old's birthday party. In previews. (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

A CHORUS LINE
A revival of the 1975 musical conceived by Michael Bennett, about twenty-four aspirants for eight spots in the chorus of a Broadway show. With music by Marvin Hamlisch and lyrics by Edward Kleban. Bob Avian directs. Previews begin Sept. 18. (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

ESOTERICA
The magician and actor Eric Walton wrote and performs in this show, a mix of magic and storytelling, directed by Elysa Marden. In previews. Opens Sept. 19. (DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

FIZZ
Sam Gold directs the world première of a comedy by Rogelio Martinez, about Roberto Goizueta, the Cuban immigrant turned C.E.O. who was behind the much ballyhooed, ultimately failed New Coke. In previews. Opens Sept. 16. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-279-4200.)

HEARTBREAK HOUSE
Roundabout Theatre Company opens its season with George Bernard Shaw's romantic drama from 1920, set on an English country estate. Starring Philip Bosco, Swoosie Kurtz, Byron Jennings, Lily Rabe, and Laila Robins. Previews begin Sept. 15. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

JAY JOHNSON: THE TWO AND ONLY
The veteran ventriloquist and ex-"Soap" star Johnson portrays an array of characters, from monkey to tennis ball, in this production, which originated at the Atlantic Theatre Company. Previews begin Sept. 19. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

JOHN FERGUSON
Mint Theatre Company revives St. John Ervine's play from 1919, about an Irish farmer who needs a miracle. Martin Platt directs. In previews. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

LEMKIN'S HOUSE
Catherine Filloux wrote this drama about Raphael Lemkin, a Polish lawyer who dedicated his life to fighting against genocide. In previews. Opens Sept. 17. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-352-3101.)

MACHIAVELLI
Evan Bergman directs Richard Vetere's comic play about the Florentine Renaissance philosopher. In previews. (ArcLight, 152 W. 71st St. 212-239-6200.)

NAMI
John Gould Rubin directs the world première of a new play by Chad Beckim, in which two neighbors intervene in what they think is a plot to sell a child into sex slavery. In previews. Opens Sept. 14. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE PAIN AND THE ITCH
Playwrights Horizons opens its season with a new comedy by Bruce Norris, a satire of a self-conscious liberal family. Anna D. Shapiro directs. In previews. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE PERSIANS
The National Theatre of Greece performs Aeschylus' historical drama in the original Greek, with English supertitles. Sept. 16-20. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE PRANCING HORSE
Sage Theatre Company presents this romantic drama by Richard Lay, about a trio of regulars at an Atlantic City casino. Opens Sept. 14. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

RICHARD II
Michael Cumpsty stars in Classic Stage Company's presentation of Shakespeare's historical drama. Brian Kulick directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 17. (136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

SISTERS
Declan Hassett's new one-woman play stars Anna Manahan as Martha and Mary, two sisters living contrasting lives in Ireland in the fifties. In previews. Opens Sept. 17. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

SOUTHERN COMFORTS
Primary Stages presents this drama, in which a widow and a widower fall in love during the golden years of their lives. Previews begin Sept. 19. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

SUBURBIA
Second Stage Theatre begins its season with an updated version of Eric Bogosian's 1994 study of teen angst and racial tension, starring Daniel Eric Gold, Jessica Capshaw, and Kieran Culkin. Jo Bonney directs. In previews. (307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

THEOPHILUS NORTH
A young traveller finds himself amidst the wealth and glamour of Newport, Rhode Island, in this adaptation of Thornton Wilder's novel from 1973. In previews. Opens Sept. 14. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

NOW PLAYING

CHERRY'S PATCH
Richard Caliban directs Ron Scott Stevens's drama about the politics of a pre-9/11 Brooklyn firehouse. (SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555. Through Sept. 17.)

FOGGY BOTTOM
The world première of a political comedy by James Armstrong, about a government bureaucrat who becomes illicitly involved with three attractive young illegal aliens. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

FRINGENYC ENCORES
Ten of the festival's best shows are reprised in repertory at two venues. (212-352-3101. For complete schedule, visit www.fringenycencores.com.)

THE GUYS
Tom Wopat stars in a commemorative limited engagement of Anne Nelson's drama, a dialogue between a fire captain who lost eight of his men on 9/11 and an editor who helps him prepare their eulogies. (The Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

THE HISTORY OF VALENTYNE AND ORSON
Ralph Lee's Mettawee River Theatre Company uses masks, puppets, and an ensemble of six actors to tell the fifteenth-century French story of a baby who was found in the forest and raised by a king. (Outdoor Garden of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, 111th St. at Amsterdam Ave. 212-929-4777. Through Sept. 17.)

IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING
Bill Bowers is a mime—but "not a scary mime"—and he has something to say. He grew up gay in Montana, he tells us, where both the landscape and the people were characterized by their profound silence; in turn, he made silence his art form and means of survival. From Montana, we follow him through a string of increasingly absurd gigs, loves found and lost, and a disillusioning stint as a pupil of Marcel Marceau. The show, directed by Martha Banta, hews closely to the familiar tools of solo confessional theatre, with only a stool and a flip chart as set pieces. But the strength of Bowers's performance, which laces sentimentality with deadpan wit, easily overcomes the conventionality of the staging. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

THE MAN HIMSELF
Alan Drury's dark comedy portrays an ordinary man's conversion to religious extremism. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

NEW YORK MUSICAL THEATRE FESTIVAL
The annual festival of new musicals returns, with more than thirty works in twelve theatres throughout the city. (Various venues. 212-352-3101. For complete schedule, visit www.nymf.org.)

SEVEN GUITARS
Set during the years when the fighter Joe Louis was known to the world as the great black hope, August Wilson's story describes the crippling effect dashed dreams can have on the dreamer and those who love him. Floyd Barton (Lance Reddick) is a musician who wants to leave Pittsburgh for the bright lights of Chicago. But his beloved girlfriend (Roslyn Ruff) cannot let go of her distrust of him, or her life as a concerned member of a small community of realists. While Reddick is a bit too actorly—clenched jaws and fists to convey tension, etc.—there are a number of standouts in the cast, particularly Brenda Pressley as Louise, who gives her pivotal role as a nosy neighbor all she's got. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

THE TREATMENT
Dylan McDermott and Portia star in the world première of a new play by Eve Ensler ("The Vagina Monologues"), about a traumatized soldier and his female psychologist. The play kicks off the Impact Festival at the Culture Project. Leigh Silverman directs. (45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

WASPS IN BED
Three old friends convene at a wedding celebration in the Berkshires in Nicola Behrman's comedy, directed by Lisa Marie Meller. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

Also Playing

ABSINTHE: Spiegeltent, Pier 17, South Street Seaport. 212-279-4200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **THE DROWSY CHAPERONE:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100. **THE FANTASTICKS:** Snapple Theatre Center, 210 W. 50th St. 212-307-4100. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **THE HISTORY BOYS:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 220 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **MARTIN SHORT: FAME BECOMES ME:** Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **NO CHILD . . . :** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **[TITLE OF SHOW]:** Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-279-4200. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **THE WEDDING SINGER:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Sept. 12-13: For those who came of age in the seventies, **Peter Frampton** was either a joke or a peerless back-seat aphrodisiac. Blessed with Samson's hair, Zeus's sex appeal, and a small arsenal of electronic gadgets that transformed his stadium-rock-by-numbers guitar into not so subtle innuendo, he rode to glory on the multiplatinum concert album "Frampton Comes Alive." Three decades later, the hair is mostly gone, but his passion for the guitar remains. He just recorded "Fingerprints," the first instrumental album of his career.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Sept. 14: The British folksinger and guitarist **Vashti Bunyan**, a veteran of the sixties scene who has recently come back into fashion with the freak-folk set. In 1965, under the tutelage of the Rolling Stones' manager, Andrew Loog Oldham, she released her first single, "Some Things Just Stick in Your Mind," which was written by Keith Richards and Mick Jagger. A few unreleased singles later, she took off in a horse-drawn wagon for Donovan's spread on the Isle of Skye, a two-year journey that inspired her 1970 début album, "Just Another Diamond Day." She dropped out of the music business after that and moved to Scotland to raise a family. Last year, Bunyan recorded a new album, "Lookaftering," with Devendra Banhart, Joanna Newsom, and other members of the younger generation. This is her first New York City appearance. With **Espers**, the harmonizing neo-psychedelic-folk sensation from Philadelphia. Sept. 17: The Chicago post-rock icons **Tortoise.**

THE HOOK
18 Commerce St., Red Hook, Brooklyn (718-797-3007)—Sept. 16: The daylong Freedom Festival 2 features the smoking trio **Earl Greyhound,** the trippy soul rockers **Dragons of Zynth,** and a slew of other acts, free of charge.

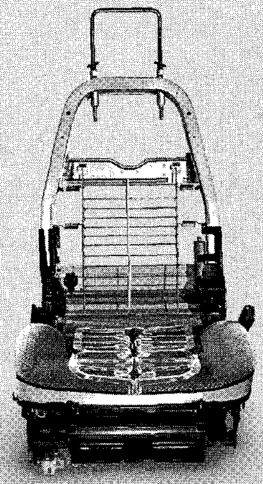
IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Sept. 17: In the late eighties and early nineties, the industrial combo **Nitzer Ebb,** a British band with an odd, Germanic-sounding name, made a big, dance-floor-oriented racket (accented with aggressive posturing and angry chanting).

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Sept. 13: The legendary Indian vocalist **Asha Puthli,** who is set to release a new jazz album next year. Sept. 14: **Rachel Fuller** is a classically trained pianist turned singer-songwriter. As befits an ambitious musician in the Myspace age, she has a significant online presence—an Internet TV show that she co-hosts with her boyfriend, the Who's Pete Townshend. During the Who's recent European tour, she followed the band in a specially equipped nineteen-fifties Airstream trailer interviewing various acts, including the Flaming Lips, the Zutons, and the Eels, and getting them to deliver raw acoustic performances. Here she'll be doing a live version of the TV show. For those who can't get their hands on what will certainly be a hot ticket, the action will be available at www.intheattic.tv. Sept. 15: **Jeffrey Foucault** celebrates the release of "Ghost Repeater," an album full of gravelly, gorgeously rolling poems about weather, trains, and love. Foucault pronounces his last name "Folk-alt," which sounds something like one of those inadequate names given to the acoustic-guitar-driven musical genre of which he is an exceptional practitioner. Sept. 19: **Emily Haines,** the lead singer of Metric, performs solo.

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—Sept. 18-19: The **Who,** one of the last classic-rock bands still standing, is now down to two original members (the drummer Keith Moon died in 1978 and the bassist John Entwistle died in 2002), but the founding guitarist, Pete Townshend, and the vocalist Roger Daltrey are hardly giving up. The band is on its first world tour in two decades and has a new studio album, "Endless Wire," coming out next month. Townshend, at sixty-one, may be partially deaf, but he does have a girlfriend roughly half his age (see Joe's Pub).

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Sept. 14: Neil Michael Hagerty, a storied indie-rock veteran, returns with a new band, the **Howling Hex.** The former Pussy Galore and Royal Trux vocalist and guitarist stays true to his two loves: stripped-down, gritty rock and envelope-pushing, avant-garde weirdness. The constant tug-of-war between these two passions keeps Hagerty's work compelling and unpredictable.

THE OY!HOO FESTIVAL
This gathering, also known as the New York Jewish Music and Heritage Festival, was started



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three years ago by the downtown promoter Michael Dorf, the founder of the eclectic club the Knitting Factory. It hits its stride this week with a wide variety of shows, including a program of Sephardic, Ladino, and Hebrew torch songs by **Jennifer Charles** and **Oren Bloedow,** of Elysian Fields (Sept. 12 at Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St.), a rendition of the Simon and Garfunkel songbook by **Aztec Two-Step** (Sept. 16 at Makor, 35 W. 67th St.), and a daylong outdoor show with ten acts from here and abroad dubbed **Jewzapalooza** (Sept. 17 in Riverside Park). (For more information, visit www.oyhoo.com.)

The Festival of New Trumpet Music starts at Merkin Concert Hall on Sept. 16.

"WORDLESS MUSIC"
This new, modestly subversive series pairs classical-music performers with instrumental musicians from other genres, such as rock, free jazz, and electronica. The series gets under way on Sept. 18 with Wilco's percussionist **Glenn Kotche,** the guitarist **Nels Cline,** the downtown composer and guitarist **Elliott Sharp,** and the concert pianist **Jenny Lin.** Kotche and Cline, two of the most versatile and open-minded performers in the rock world, will mix it up with Sharp, while the slightly more traditional Lin will concentrate on works by Ligeti and Shostakovich and a new piece for computer and piano by Sharp. (Good Shepherd Faith Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. For more information, visit www.wordlessmusic.org.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
Sept. 15: The sultry vocalist **Natacha Atlas,** formerly of the U.K. electronica group Transglobal Underground, opens the Institute's fall season with an acoustic show featuring songs from Fairuz and Abdel Halim Hafez and from her latest CD, "Mish Maoul." (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St.) Sept. 16: A night of Persian classical music with **Parissa** and the **Dastan Ensemble.** (Symphony Space.) (For more information, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—**Dave Liebman** celebrates his sixtieth birthday this week. Four different ensembles spread over four nights hardly begins to explore the saxophonist's ever-expanding musical universe, but there's only so much time in a week. The forward-thinking veteran tangles with the guest saxophonist **Ellery Eskelin** on the first night, Sept. 13; fronts his own established quartet on Sept. 14; leads a big band on Sept. 15; and finishes, on Sept. 16, with a tribute to Miles Davis and John Coltrane featuring the trumpeter **Randy Brecker** and the saxophonist **Ravi Coltrane.**

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Sept. 12-17: A double bill that might just remove any doubts about jazz's future: the wild and woolly **Bad Plus** trio, which merges jazz smarts with rock energy, joins the daring and inventive pianist **Jason Moran** and his ensemble, Bandwagon.

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Sept. 12-23: The songwriting and producing legends **Ashford & Simpson,** who know something about how to rock a stage, will do their part to transform this upscale supper club into the Apollo Theatre South.

FESTIVAL OF NEW TRUMPET MUSIC
In its four-year history, this gathering (a.k.a. FONT Music), co-curated by Dave Douglas, Roy Campbell, Jr., and Jon Nelson, has grown from a few nights at Tonic into a monthlong multi-venue event encompassing the worlds of jazz, new music, classical, rock, and hip-hop. An international lineup of trumpeters strides into town, bringing specially commissioned works, inventive interpretations of old standards, and blistering feats of improvisation. The opening show, on Sept. 16, features **Dave Douglas** and **Roy Campbell, Jr.,** in a tribute to Don Cherry. Each will be playing with his own quartet, and the two will join together for Cherry's "Symphony for Improvisers." The bassist **Henry Grimes,** who played on the original 1966 recording of the same name, lends continuity to the free-bop classic. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St.) Other shows this week include a master class on Sept. 17 with **David Kraus,** a co-principal trumpet player of the Metropolitan Opera. (Yamaha Artist Services Center, 689 Fifth Ave., at 54th St.) (For more information, visit www.fontmusic.org. Through Oct. 15.)

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Now gone for as long as he was alive, John Coltrane remains an unimpeachable presence in jazz. This celebration of what would have been his eightieth birthday includes performances of the innovative saxophonist's work by the **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra** in Rose Hall (Sept. 14-16), as well as a reëxamination of the classic 1963 album "John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman" by a small group featuring the pianist **Eric Reed,** the saxophonist **Todd Williams,** and the singer **Kevin Mahogany** (Allen Room, Sept. 15-16).

THE STONE
Avenue C at 2nd St. (No phone)—**Billy Martin,** the drummer for Medeski Martin and Wood, co-curates the music this month with Cyro Baptista, the Brazilian-born percussionist and composer. Sept. 14: **Jamie Saft,** a longtime collaborator of John Zorn's who has backed the Beastie Boys, pays tribute to Bob Dylan with his piano trio. On his new album, "Trouble," the multi-instrumentalist, composer, and producer rearranges some of the great folk rocker's material, and, except for a couple of songs with guest vocalists (Mike Patton in "Ballad of a Thin Man" and Antony of Antony and the Johnsons in "Living the Blues"), he lets the instruments do the talking. Sept. 15: An evening of intense, chaotic beauty from the downtown improvisers **Ikue Mori,** on electronics, **DJ Olive,** on turntables, **Okkyung Lee,** on cello, and Martin on percussion. Sept. 16: Martin performs to video projections, including a fourteen-minute meditation on the textual and erotic nature of jellyfish. Sept. 17: A unique opportunity to see a solo performance by **Airto Moreira,** the legendary percussionist and drummer from Brazil. (For more information, visit www.thestonenyc.com.)

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde."** The Parisian gallerist Vollard (1867-1939) was an early champion of Matisse, Bonnard, van Gogh, Gauguin, Derain, and many others; this unusually canted show will comprise samples of the work they made under his encouragement and patronage. The two giants of the show's title will be represented with canvases from solo shows that Vollard mounted in 1895 and 1901, respectively. Opens Sept. 14. ♦ **"Cai Guo-Qiang on the Roof: Transparent Monument."** Since April, the roof garden has been home to four sculptural works by the Chinese-born artist. Among them is "Clear Sky Black Cloud," a timed gunpowder explosion that produces a small cloud of smoke over Central Park each day at noon. Through Oct. 29. ♦ **"Rembrandt and His Circle: Drawings and Prints."** Through Oct. 15. ♦ **"The Fabric of Life: Ikat Textiles of Indonesia."** Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"Accordions and Harmonicas of the Nineteenth Century."** Through March 31. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Artist's Choice: Herzog & de Meuron, Perception Restrained."** The Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron have built what they call a "perception machine" to view objects culled from the permanent collection. Through Sept. 25. ♦ **"Since 2000: Printmaking Now"** includes recent work by Richard Tuttle, William Kentridge, Andrea Zittel, Matthew Barney, Kelley Walker, Paul Chan, Swoon, and Nicola López. Through Sept. 18. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"No Limits, Just Edges: Jackson Pollock Paintings on Paper."** Through Sept. 29. ♦ **"Zaha Hadid."** Through Oct. 25. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—Much of **"Full House,"** the Whitney's seventy-fifth-anniversary extravaganza, remains open into the fall, including the Pop art on the third floor (through Oct. 8), the Abstract Expressionism on the second floor (through Oct. 15), and the magnificent fifth-floor display of the works of Edward Hopper, which now includes "Nighthawks" (1942), on loan from the Art Institute of Chicago (through Dec. 3). (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Looking Back from Ground Zero: Images from the Brooklyn Museum Collection."** Through Jan. 7. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

DAHESH MUSEUM OF ART
580 Madison Ave., at 57th St. (212-759-0606)—**"Napoleon on the Nile: Soldiers, Artists, and the Rediscovery of Egypt."** Through Dec. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Jean-Étienne Liotard (1702-89): Swiss Master."** Through Sept. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

PATRICK LONG

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—The theme of **"Ecotopia,"** I.C.P.'s second Triennial of Photography and Video, is the global environment in flux and in trouble. The artists, some having their New York début here, are from fourteen countries and include Simon Norfolk, Sophie Ristelhueber, Robert Adams, Thomas Ruff, Alessandra Sanguinetti, Mitch Epstein, and Joan Fontcuberta. Opens Sept. 14. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Eva Hesse: Sculpture."** Through Sept. 17. ♦ **"Idol Worship: Video by Ariela Plotkin and Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay."** The transgressions of "American Idol" contestants have always seemed more aesthetic than Biblical. The Book of Exodus is invoked here, however, to remind faithful viewers that "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above, or on the earth below, or in the water under the earth." The Canadian artist Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay defies Biblical edicts with a confessional "audition tape" dedicated to the Russian lesbian-chic singing duo Tatu. The Israeli artist Ariela Plotkin tries harder to mesh the worlds of religion and popular culture with a video that draws on Jewish hymns and Roy Orbison filtered through an Orthodox Jewish band called Schlock Rock. In both cases, exhibitionism rather than idolatry are paramount. Through Oct. 26. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, Thursdays, 11 to 9, and Fridays, 11 to 3. For the duration of the Hesse show, the museum will also be open on Saturdays, from 11 to 5:45, with no charge for admission.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—Two small exhibitions commemorate watershed events. **"From Rembrandt to van Gogh: Dutch Drawings from the Morgan"** cherry-picks works from a handful of Old Masters to mark the publication of a drawings-collection catalogue raisonné. The mostly small sheets present a charming assortment of genre scenes and still-lifes, including a vibrant bouquet of tiger-striped tulips by Anthony Claesz II and a quick, questing landscape by van Gogh. **"Celebrating Rembrandt: Etchings from the Morgan,"** which honors the four-hundredth anniversary of the artist's birth, follows immediately, and the variety of hands in the first gallery only confirms the singular genius of van Rijn. The library owns impressions of most of his known etchings, including multiple self-portraits, scenes from the life of Christ, and a saucy vignette of a monk caught in flagrante with a milkmaid. Both through Oct. 1. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"Italia! Muse to American Artists"** is a modest show with a massive subject: Italy's influence on American artists since 1830. Through Dec. 31. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Gustav Klimt: Five Paintings from the Collection of Ferdinand and Adele Bloch-Bauer"** includes the 1907 gold-and-silver-laced portrait of Adele, which will be joining the Neue Galerie's permanent collection. Through Sept. 18. (Open Thursdays and Saturdays through Mondays, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 11 to 9.)

NOGUCHI MUSEUM
9-01 33rd Rd., at Vernon Blvd., Long Island City (718-204-7088)—**"Best of Friends: R. Buckminster Fuller and Isamu Noguchi."** Through Oct. 15. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—The human body is put through its paces—and beyond—in **"Into Me/Out of Me,"** a conceptual survey of art from the past forty years by more than a hundred and thirty artists, including Carolee Schneemann, Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, Paul McCarthy, Marina Abramović, Kiki Smith, Cindy Sherman, Matthew Barney, and Catherine Opie. This is not, by any means, a polite exhibition, but it fulfills in many ways the edicts of the figurative tradition, since even Leonardo, in one of his darker, less humanist moments, described the body as a mere vessel through which things pass. Through Sept. 25. ♦ **"Time Frame."** Through Oct. 2. ♦ **"Ron Gorchov: Double Trouble."** Through Nov. 20. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

QUEEN SOFÍA SPANISH INSTITUTE
684 Park Ave., at 68th St. (212-628-0420)—**"Ràfols-Casamada Paintings 1950-2005."** Through Sept. 29. (Open Mondays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—Visions of flight are common to all cultures. But in the Himalayas, topography alone viscerally suggests soaring into the sublime. Airborne Buddhist deities from Tibet, Nepal, and Bhutan—uplifted on wings, levitating in seated meditation, and buoyed by supernaturally billowing robes—are the focus of **"Take to the Sky: Flying Mystics in Himalayan Art."** Garuda, the eagle king of the birds, features prominently, as do floating pairs of entwined lovers, and deus-ex-machina Siddhas coming to the rescue in a genre of tapestry-like teaching-paintings known as "Stories of Noble Deeds." Through Jan. 8. (Open Mondays and Thursdays, 11 to 5, Wednesdays, 11 to 7, Fridays, 11 to 10, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES–UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER
Artschwager's materials have always been more Pop than his subjects. This new show looks back at his career with paintings on pebbly Celotex, sculpture in Formica, and drawings from the sixties through the eighties. Opens Sept. 12. (Castelli, 18 E. 77th St. 212-249-4470.)

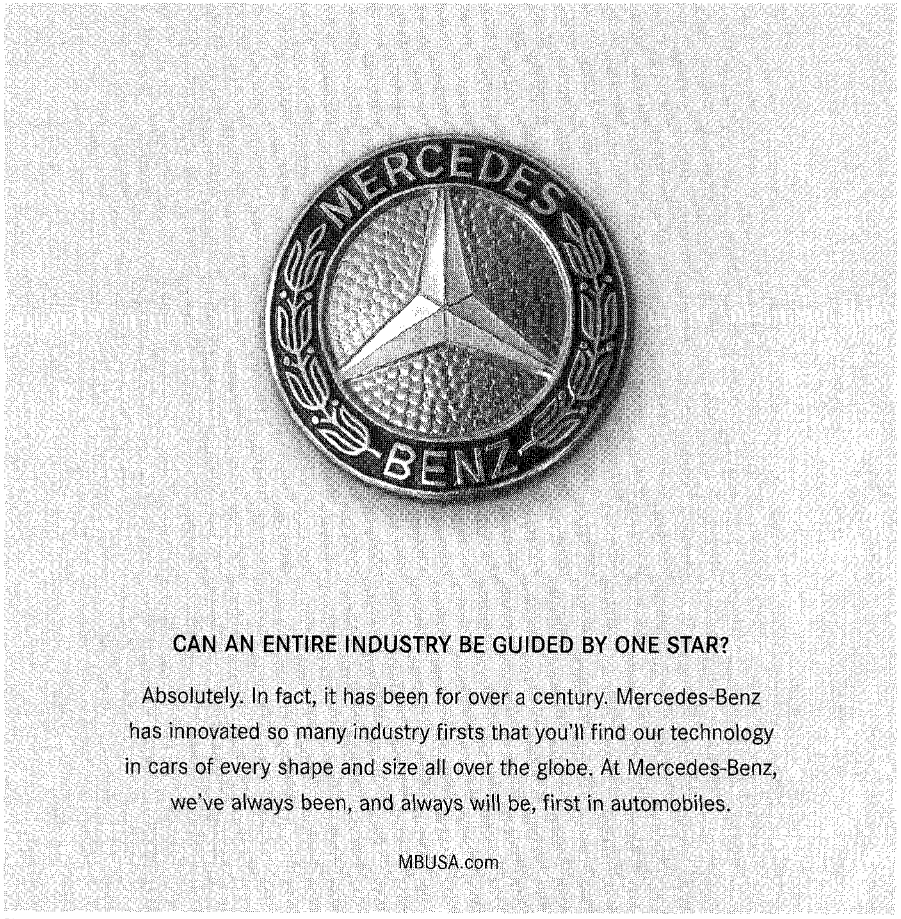
"WALKER EVANS: CARBON AND SILVER"
Although this exhibition might come off a bit too much like a beautifully illustrated lesson plan, it tackles a number of important issues about the changing nature of photography with remarkable clarity and flair. A wide range of Evans's startlingly straightforward work from the mid-nineteen-thirties—including pictures of tenant farmers, spare interiors, and rural churches in the South that have since become modern classics—is shown in several formats, from small, traditional gelatin-silver prints made and signed in his lifetime to massive ink-jet blowups newly printed from digital files. We're invited to compare and contrast the various processes, question the value of authenticity, and marvel at Evans's still-pervasive influence. Through Nov. 17. (UBS, 1285 Sixth Ave. 212-713-2885.)

GIORGIO MORANDI
A quiet blockbuster of a show at Lucas Schoormans in the fall of 2004 reminded viewers how powerful the diminutive landscapes and still-lifes of Morandi (1890-1964) are. This exhibition of paintings and works on paper offers a fresh chance to contemplate his graceful assemblies of bottles and boxes. Opens Sept. 12. (Thiebaud, 42 E. 76th St. 212-737-9759.)

FRANZ ROH
A group of eighty photographs and collages, primarily from the nineteen-thirties, by this German artist and critic (1890-1965), whose avant-garde experimentation typified the period's influential "New Vision." Opens Sept. 14. (Ubu, 416 E. 59th St. 212-753-4444.)

Short List

ELINOR CARUCCI: Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-750-7070. Through Oct. 21. **MALERIE MARDER:** Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at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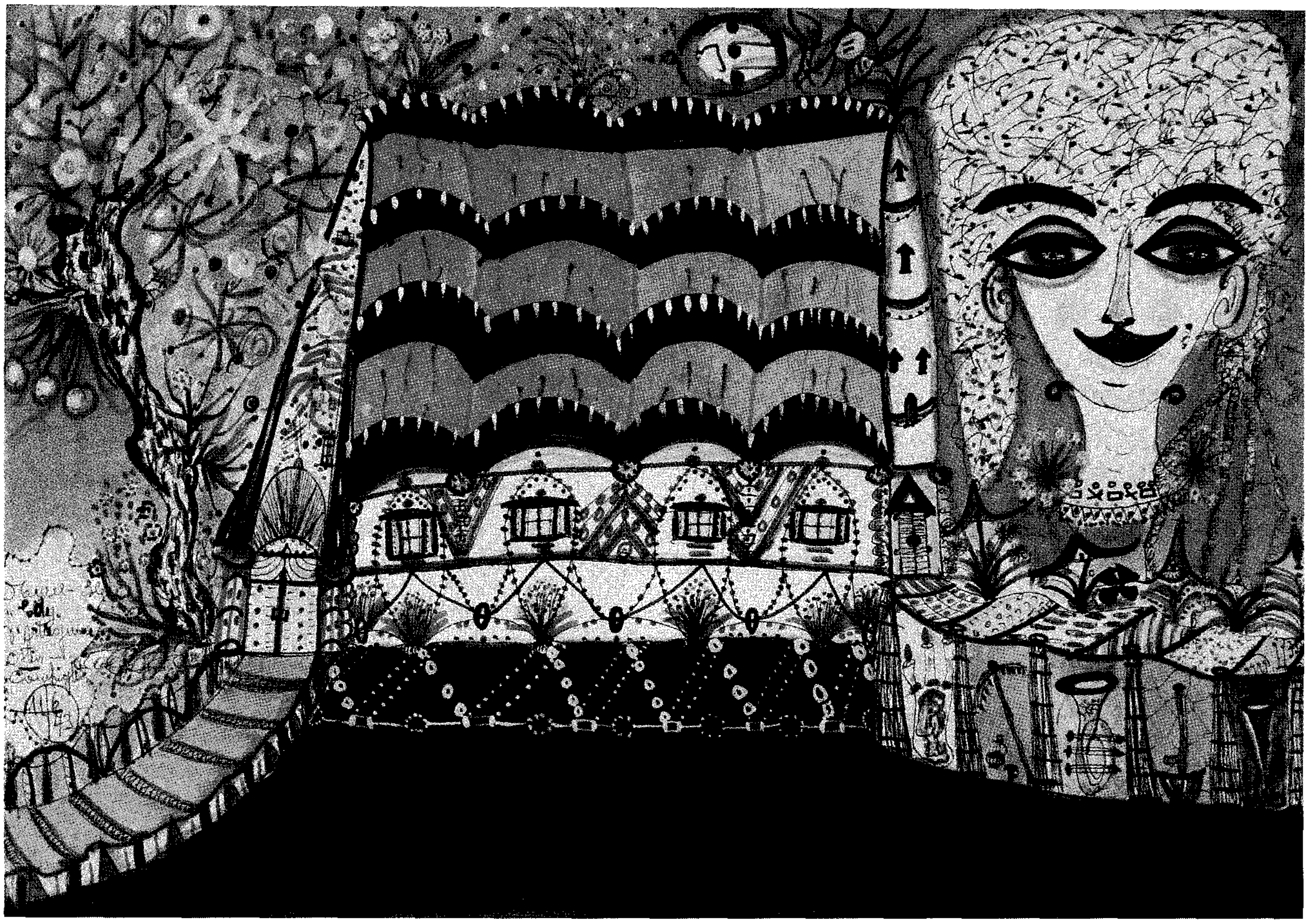


The Tribeca gallery KS Art is presenting a show of drawings and watercolors by the self-taught Italian artist Ele D'Artagnan.

ELE D'ARTAGNAN, "CASA DONNA CON SCALA, ALBERO E SIMBOLI" (1973)

57th St. 212-445-0444. Through Oct. 7. **ANNETTE MESSAGER / YANG FUDONG:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Oct. 14. **SARAH SZE:** Public Art Fund, Doris C. Freedman Plaza, 60th St. at Fifth Ave. 212-980-4575. Through Oct. 22. **ANDY WARHOL:** L & M Arts, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020. Through Oct. 7. **ALEXI WORTH:** Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-247-2111. Through Oct. 7. **"EYE OF THE BEHOLDER: PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE COLLECTION OF RICHARD AVEDON":** Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999. Through Sept. 16. **"LANDSCAPE IN YOUR MIND":** Austrian Cultural Forum, 11 E. 52nd St. 212-319-5300. Through Oct. 28.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

DONALD BAECHLER

New paintings and a bronze sculpture by an artist who peoples his work with funny, blobby characters and chipper floral arrangements that teeter between the cheerfulness of cartoons and the dark angst of mid-century Informel artists such as Dubuffet and Fautrier. Opens Sept. 14. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727.)

CÉLESTE BOURSIER-MOUGENOT

For this show of new work, the sound artist Boursier-Mougenot installs two technopoetic contraptions: a suite of vacuum cleaners programmed to blow into harmonicas, and a video of a candle flame, in which light is translated into audible patterns. Through Oct. 21. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)

JEFF BROUWS

The landscape photographs in "Approaching Nowhere" find the hard-travelling Brouws back on the road in America. Though his subjects—desolate highways, motels, coffee shops, and gas stations—are almost generic, his dead-on color images never are. Through Oct. 14. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 24th St. 212-989-7600.)

BARNABY FURNAS

This show of new paintings, including a series of monumental canvases on which paint has been poured to depict floods and the parting of the Red Sea, is the first in Marianne Boesky's new location. Opens Sept. 16. (509 W. 24th St. 212-680-9889.)

KAREN KILIMNIK

Kilimnik's creepily precious faux-naïf paintings explode off the walls in her seventh exhibition at 303. Tracing the romantic fringes of Western history, she offers, in addition to new paintings, a tent from the Napoleonic campaigns and an architectural folly with a video of a bluebird in a forest. Opens Sept. 16. (525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121.)

ESKO MÄNNIKKÖ

For his first U.S. show since 1997, the Finnish photographer mounts an installation with work from three recent series that focus on his country's rural life, including closeup views of horses and cows and still-lifes of dead birds and fish, all in found wood frames. Through Oct. 21. (Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

ALBERT OEHLEN

One of the exuberantly disgruntled abstractionists to come out of Germany in the eighties, Oehlen has aged gracefully in avant terms: his paintings are appreciatively described as "ugly," and he has moonlighted with the band the Red Krayola. New work will be on view. Opens Sept. 15. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

POLIXENI PAPAPETROU

For her U.S. début, this Australian photographer shows large-scale color images from a series called "Haunted Country" that imagine historical incidents—now much romanticized or turned into cautionary tales—of white children lost and wandering in the bush. Opens Sept. 14. (Foley, 547 W. 27th St. 212-244-9081.)

SETH PRICE

A multi-venue show of film and video works, created mostly from found sources, that questions how images are circulated and disseminated—and, hence, how they derive meaning and authority. Through Sept. 30. (Petzel, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467; Reena Spaulings, 165 East Broadway. 212-477-5006; Electronic Arts Intermix, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-337-0680.)

KAY ROSEN

Rosen's language-based painting can be either playful or heavy-hitting. Here she combines both impulses with drawings that perform the art version of Jumble, and two larger wall paintings, one of which responds to and commemorates Hurricane Katrina. Opens Sept. 14. (Lambert, 564 W. 25th St. 212-242-3611.)

LUCAS SAMARAS

New video works, including a twenty-five-channel installation titled "Ecdysiast"; contrary to the method of his "Sittings" series, it is the artist, not his subjects, who sheds clothing and inhibitions. Opens Sept. 12. (PaceWildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000.)

BEAT STREULI

A Swiss photographer whose work often focusses on individuals moving through public space, unaware that they are being observed, shows a three-screen video projection and a room papered with larger-than-life portraits, all made at a train stop in a neighborhood of Brussels populated largely by immigrant Muslims. Opens Sept. 15. (Murray Guy, 453 W. 17th St. 212-463-7372.)

CHRIS VERENE

Verene began photographing his family, friends, and neighbors in Galesburg, Illinois, twenty years ago, when he was sixteen. Here he shows new color work from this ongoing series. The images' underlying unease is summed up in one of his handwritten captions: "Candi and Craig lost their jobs when the factories moved to Mexico." Opens Sept. 14. (Kagan, 540 W. 29th St. 212-560-0670.)

Short List

LOLA ALVAREZ BRAVO: Aperture, 547 W. 27th St. 212-505-5555. Through Nov. 2. **STUART HAWKINS:** Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700. Through Sept. 23. **MICHAEL HEIZER:** PaceWildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-989-4258. Through Sept. 23. **JESPER JUST:** Rubenstein, 527 W. 23rd St. 212-627-8000. Through Oct. 28. **REINER LEIST:** Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410. Through Oct. 14. **NICOLA LÓPEZ:** Golden, 539 W. 23rd St. 212-727-8304. Through Oct. 14. **JOHN MCCRACKEN / JOCKUM NORDSTRÖM:** Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Oct. 14. **ADAM MCEWEN:** Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through Oct. 14. **VIK MUNIZ:** Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262. Through Oct. 14. **AMY MYERS:** Weiss, 520 W. 24th St. 212-691-6899. Through Oct. 7. **CATHERINE OPIE:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Oct. 14. **HANS RICHTER:** Stendhal, 545 W. 20th St. 212-366-1549. Through Sept. 16. **ALESSANDRA SANGUINETTI:** Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370. Through Oct. 14. **RICHARD SERRA:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through Sept. 23. **JESSICA STOCKHOLDER:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400. Through Oct. 14. **"I WILL NOT MAKE ANY MORE BORING ART: LITHOGRAPHS, PUBLICATIONS, AND EPHEMERA FROM THE NOVA SCOTIA COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN":** Printed Matter, Inc., 195 Tenth Ave. 212-925-0325. Through Sept. 23. **"LEAST WANTED: A CENTURY OF AMERICAN MUGSHOTS":** Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978. Opens Sept. 14.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

ELE D'ARTAGNAN

The eccentric Italian actor and self-taught artist (1911-87) spent his later years homeless in Rome, where several years ago a stash of his watercolors and drawings was found in a couple of suitcases in a wine cave; the colorful and erotic works in this show come from those suitcases, and were made in the seventies. Through Oct. 7. (KS Art, 73 Leonard St. 212-219-9918.)

JANE SOUTH

South's delicate installations, made from hand-cut, folded, and painted paper, counter the heavy materiality of their subjects. In this case, it's a wall-length tableau that conjures the cogs and gears of heavy industry—and the mechanized solidity of sculptors such as Louise Nevelson and Lee Bontecou. Opens Sept. 12. (Spencer Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 212-334-3455.)

AARON YOUNG

Young (whose grafittied bronze boulder sculptures were in the Whitney Biennial this spring) addresses the aftereffects of actions with an installation of sculptures modelled on L.A. curbs. He had skateboarders perform tricks on the sculptures to abrade their painted bronze surfaces, and also called in a motorcycle trick rider named Wink to burn rubber through the gallery, leaving sprays of black. A series of related silk-screen works fill the back room. Through Oct. 14. (Harris Lieberman, 89 Vandam St. 212-206-1290.)

DANCE

"NEW BALLET CHOREOGRAPHERS"

Miller Theatre and the Guggenheim's Works & Process have commissioned four short ballets from a trio of young choreographers. The promising Brian Reeder (a former A.B.T. dancer) has made a piece for the A.B.T. Studio Company. Edwaard Liang (a soloist with N.Y.C.B.) has created two pas de deux for his colleagues, one for Maria Kowroski and Albert Evans, and the other for Wendy Whelan and the quietly compelling Craig Hall. A dance by Tom Gold, an N.Y.C.B. soloist with excellent comic instincts, is performed by an enticing cast of N.Y.C.B. dancers. (Miller Theatre, 116th St. at Broadway. 212-854-7799. Sept. 13 at 7 and Sept. 15-16 at 8.)

JEREMY NELSON

Nelson, who made a name for himself as a dancer with Stephen Petronio, has lately become known as a dance-for-dance's-sake choreographer. The title of his latest work, "Mean Piece," hints at a more emotional subtext than usual, but movement itself is still the subject—in this case, turbulence, near-misses, and the tension they generate. Sharing the program is the similarly even-tempered and meticulously balanced "Accent Elimination," from 2004. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Sept. 13-16 at 7:30.)

"AGORA II"

The site-specific choreographer Noémie LaFrance returns to the vast, empty pool in Greenpoint's McCarren Park. This time, to fill the massive space, LaFrance's troupe teams with dancers from Streb, the Young Dance Collective, Celeste Hastings and the Butoh Rockettes, and many others, and select audience participants, who perform unison moves they've learned in advance on the Web site. Bora Yoon directs the live music as dancers swarm the pool and the featured characters—including an astronaut, a waitress, a butcher, and a roller skater—emerge. Meanwhile, a beat-boxer flies by on a bicycle, a stuntwoman breaks boards, a bunch of movers carry furniture, and people dash in with buckets of water, filling an inflatable pool. (Lorimer St. at Driggs St., Brooklyn. 718-388-6309. Sept. 13-16 at 8. Through Sept. 30.)

"CANDIES: GIRLISH HARDCORE"

Shirotama Hitsujiya's all-female troupe Yubiwa Hotel, a force in Japan's alternative-theatre scene, makes its U.S. début with a performance piece that critiques a convoy of Japanese female stereotypes, from schoolgirl to stripper to spinster. As the costume changes progress from white nightgowns to black cocktail dresses to cartoon masks to nude, tattooed bodies, a voice-over narration propels the women through long gestural movement sequences. Slowly and repeatedly, they eat, play catch, fight, undress—prisoners of a moody underworld. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 212-715-1258. Sept. 14-16 at 7:30.)

DANCENOW/NYC—THE FESTIVAL

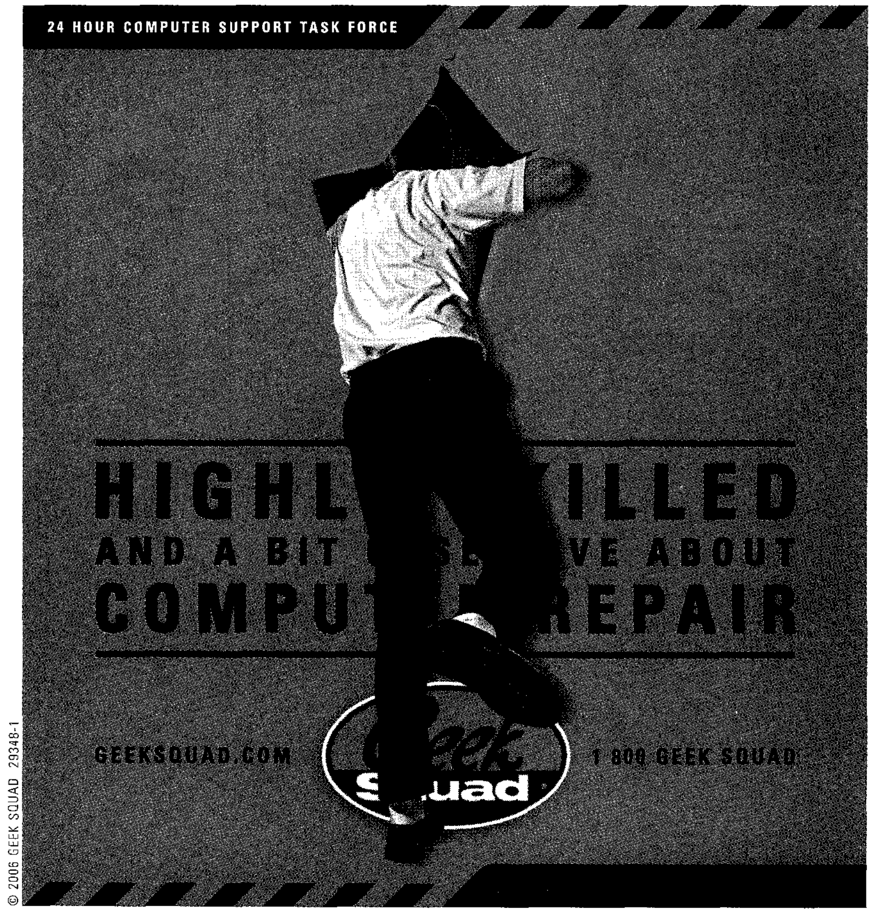
In its final week, the festival moves to the small stage at Joe's Pub. The acts include a duet from the witty postmodernist Monica Bill Barnes, a new Larry Keigwin solo set to Satie, Irish step dancing from Darrah Carr Dance, a comic duet performed by the Bang Group's David Parker and Jeff Kazin, and a meditation on capitalism from the Movement Movement/Martha Williams. Leigh Garrett hosts. (425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200. Sept. 14-16 at 9:30. For complete schedule, see www.dancenownyc.org.)

KINETIC DANCE THEATRE

"Sleeping Giant," a reworking of a 2002 dance-theatre piece, enacts archetypal dreams—being late, going onstage unrehearsed—through masks, candles, portentously declaimed surrealist poetry, and tame Bob Fosse gyrations set to jazz-fusion recordings. The company's Broadway sass can be potent, but here it's largely muffled by the dopey is-he-still-dreaming concept. (TADA! Theatre, 15 W. 28th St. 212-868-4444. Sept. 16-17 at 8 and Sept. 18 at 7. Through Sept. 30.)

"82 DECIBELS"

During last year's dance charrette, a time-limited choreography challenge that was part of the "Dancing in the Streets" series, Larry Keigwin was among the dance-makers who created a short piece in the old Tobacco Warehouse in Brooklyn Bridge Park. In an open-air, echoing corner of the warehouse, Keigwin sent his black-clad dancers scurrying about, yammering into cell phones. For this year's series, Keigwin again incorporates dancers as pedestrians into the intentional mayhem, in an expanded version of the piece. (Water St. at New



Dock St., Empire-Fulton Ferry State Park, Brooklyn. 212-625-3505. Sept. 17 at 1:30 and 5 and Sept. 19 at 6.)

"CELEBRATE MÉXICO NOW"

This showcase of contemporary Mexican culture features dance performances by a handful of up-and-coming companies. The Yucatán-born, New York-based choreographer Ofelia Loret de Mola founded Danscores in 2003; at the Joyce SoHo, Sept. 14-16, they will perform her new work "Aktun Spukil," an evocation of the Calcehtok caves in Mexico through slow, deliberate, abstract movement combined with ecstatic bursts and motifs that look like tasks. Sept. 14-17, Dance New Amsterdam presents three emerging choreographers, Geraldine Cardiel, Miguel Anaya, and Eun Jung Gonzalez, performing recent work. (Various venues. For complete schedule, visit www.mexiconowfestival.org.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC CONCERTS IN TOWN

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Sept. 13 at 7:30: Two old friends, Emanuel Ax and Yefim Bronfman, add a merry touch to the orchestra's opening-night gala, in which its music director, Lorin Maazel, conducts a program of music by Beethoven (the "Egmont" Overture and the Symphony No. 3, "Eroica") and Mozart (the sunny Concerto for Two Pianos in E-Flat Major). ♦ Sept. 14 and Sept. 19 at 7:30, Sept. 15 at 2, and Sept. 16 at 8: Another old friend of the Philharmonic, the composer Hans Werner Henze, will enjoy the U.S. première of "Sebastian im Traum" (a fantasy inspired by the poem by Georg Trakl), a work that the Philharmonic co-commissioned. The rest of the program is familiar, with Itzhak Perlman lending his warm colors to Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1 and Maazel leading two showpieces, Ravel's "Rapsodie Espagnole" and Stravinsky's "Firebird" Suite. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

It's no secret that these are challenging times at City Opera, so the company is beginning its season with one of its strengths—Handel. This time, it's a new production of **"Semele,"** a late English-language work, featuring two radiant young American singers, Elizabeth Futral (in the title role) and Vivica Genaux (in her company début); Antony Walker conducts. (Sept. 13 at 7:30, Sept. 15 at 8, and Sept. 17 at 1:30.) ♦ Rinat Shaham, a petite but potent mezzo-soprano, is City Opera's latest cigarette girl of choice in **"Carmen,"** in performances that also feature Latonia Moore (as Micaëla), Mark Duffin, and Adrian Gans; Ari Pelto. (Sept. 14 at 7:30 and Sept. 16 at 1:30.) ♦ The invigorating James Robinson production of **"La Bohème,"** with Shu-Ying Li, Elizabeth Caballero, James Valenti, and Daniel Mobbs; George Manahan. (Sept. 16 at 8.) ♦ The company is holding its fall gala performance as a separate concert event, hosted by the soprano Carol Vaness, with Mark Lamos directing a series of opera highlights that will feature such singers as Futral, Genaux, and Samuel Ramey; Manahan, City Opera's music director, and his distinguished predecessor Julius Rudel conduct. (Sept. 19 at 7:30.) (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

CONCERT ARTISTS GUILD SERIES

In the first of four concerts at the Thalia Theatre's cabaret-like space, the Guild presents two appealing young artists, the pianist Jade Simmons and the percussionist Svet Stoyanov, performing two extremes of the American repertory—Barber's Piano Sonata and Steve Reich's "Electric Counterpoint" (in a composer-approved percussion arrangement). They team up for Tania León's duo "A la Par." (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Sept. 14 at 7:30.)

Advertisement

"...It keeps acting funny."

PAULA ROBISON AND KEN NODA

The flutist, best known for her Vivaldi concerts at the Met, shows her range in a program (with the superb pianist Ken Noda) that features the world première of Michael Tilson Thomas's "Notturno," along with works by Takemitsu, Martinů, Fauré, and Cecile Chaminade. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Sept. 15 at 7.)

BARGEMUSIC

Sept. 15 at 7:30: Steven Lubin, one of the more respected veterans of the period-performance community, offers a sheaf of Beethoven piano sonatas (including the "Waldstein" and the "Appassionata"). ♦ Sept. 16 at 7:30: In the first of two concerts, the up-and-coming Quartetto di Cremona performs the String Quartet No. 3 by the esteemed Italian composer Fabio Vacchi in between favorite quartets by Shostakovich (the Eighth) and Schubert (No. 14, "Death and the Maiden"). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. For complete schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

ISSUE PROJECT ROOM: NED ROTHENBERG

The renowned American experimentalist composer and wind player is given a fiftieth-birthday toast by such musicians as the saxophonist John Zorn, the pianist Sylvie Courvoisier, and the drummer Gerry Hemingway, who will collaborate with him in a selection of his works. (400 Carroll St., between Bond and Nevins Sts., Brooklyn. 718-330-0313. Sept. 15 at 8.)

YO-YO MA AND THE SILK ROAD ENSEMBLE

This movable feast of exquisitely crafted world music has become the cellist's main engine for generating new works. He will join not only his seasoned Silk Road regulars (such as the pi-pa player Wu Man, the *kemancheh* virtuoso Kayhan Kalhor, and the violinist Colin Jacobsen) but also several promising young artists in performances of new and recent pieces by such composers as Osvaldo Golijov, Evan Ziporyn, and Gabriela Lena Frank. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Sept. 16-17 at 4 and 8.)

ARMENIAN INDEPENDENCE CONCERT

To celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of Armenia's independence, the pianist Shahan Arzruni joins several New York stalwarts (including the cellist André Emelianoff) to perform works from both the country's Soviet and independent eras by such composers as Tigran Mansuryan (the New York première of "Hayren," with the compelling violist Kim Kashkashian) and Edvard Mirzoyan—though lovers of Khachaturian's "Sabre Dance" will have to look elsewhere. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Sept. 17 at 7.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

In Holland, whole families devote themselves to the cause of early music—including that of the young violinist Janine Jansen, whose recent recording of "The Four Seasons" is notable for more than its seductive cover photograph. She will be backed up by the conductorless chamber orchestra to perform excerpts from Vivaldi's masterpiece, along with two violin concertos by Bach (the E Major and the Double Concerto, with the violinist Eriko Sato), in the Metropolitan Museum's opening concert of the season, offered in the Great Hall. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Sept. 18 at 7.)

MIRROR VISIONS ENSEMBLE

The New Haven-based group of three singers and piano, committed and elegant advocates for new American works, offer their first concert of the season, a program of songs (based on the letters of such luminaries as Gertrude Stein and Madame de Sévigné) by Paul Bowles, Richard Hundley, Daron Hagen, and others. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Sept. 18 at 8.)

OUT OF TOWN

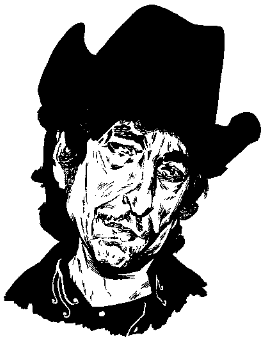
SOUTH SHORE MUSIC SERIES

The guitar virtuoso Eliot Fisk brings his crisp and dazzling style to music by Scarlatti, Paganini, and Bach, in a concert at Westport's Town Hall. (110 Myrtle Ave., Westport, Conn. 866-776-8745. Sept. 15 at 8.)

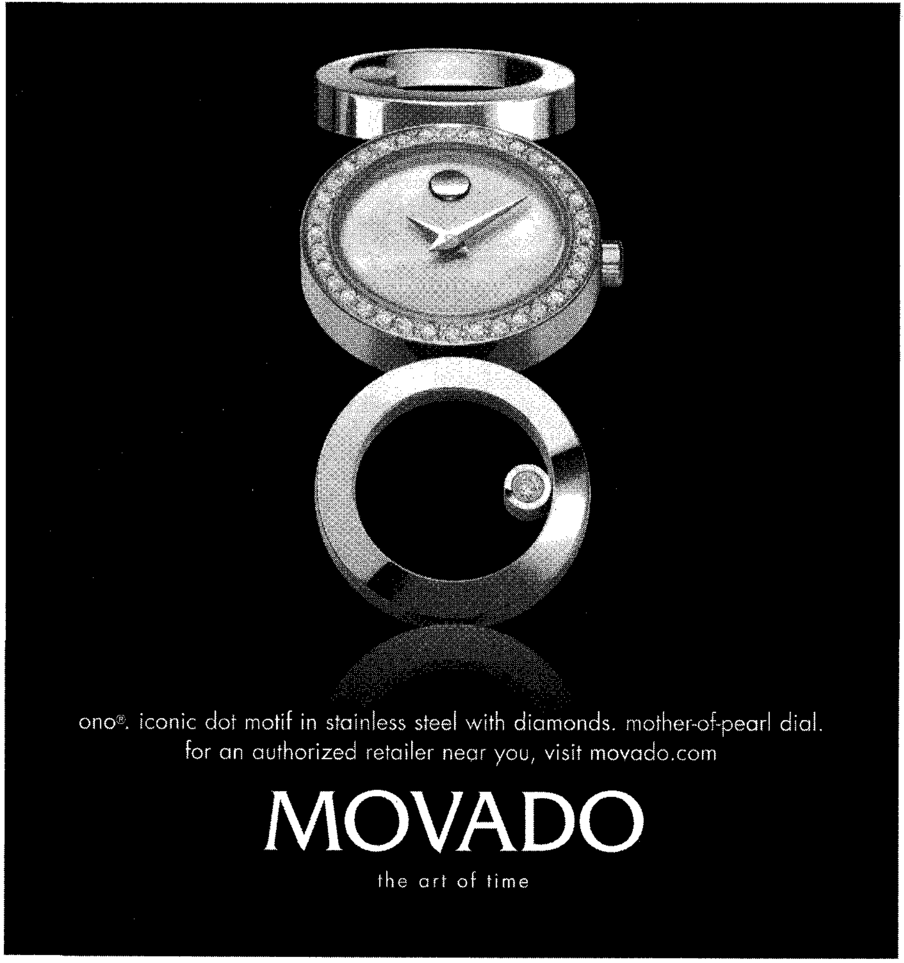
ANDY FRIEDMAN

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
FINAL THEME

"As I walked out tonight in the mystic garden / The wounded flowers were dangling from the vine." As usual, it is the words that seize your attention first. "Ain't Talkin'," the last song on Bob Dylan's deceptively mellow-sounding new album, "Modern Times," places the listener in a landscape of sweet decay, as handsomely ruined as Dylan's sixtysomething voice, populated by sick mules, blind horses, a missing gardener, nameless foes, some woman, and the walking, weeping, brooding, ironically smiling singer. The vocal line is threadbare: it consists of just five notes, the ancient pentatonic scale. But it is the unswerving sureness of the musical choices—guitars twisting like vines around plain chord changes, an intermittently keening cello, a steady pulse like dripping water—that holds you mesmerized. The protagonist seems to be searching for some sign of hope in the apocalyptic garden, and, at the last moment, he finds it: after eight minutes in the minor mode, and a sighing reference to the "world's end," a moonbeam falls in the form of a glowing major chord.



—Alex Ross



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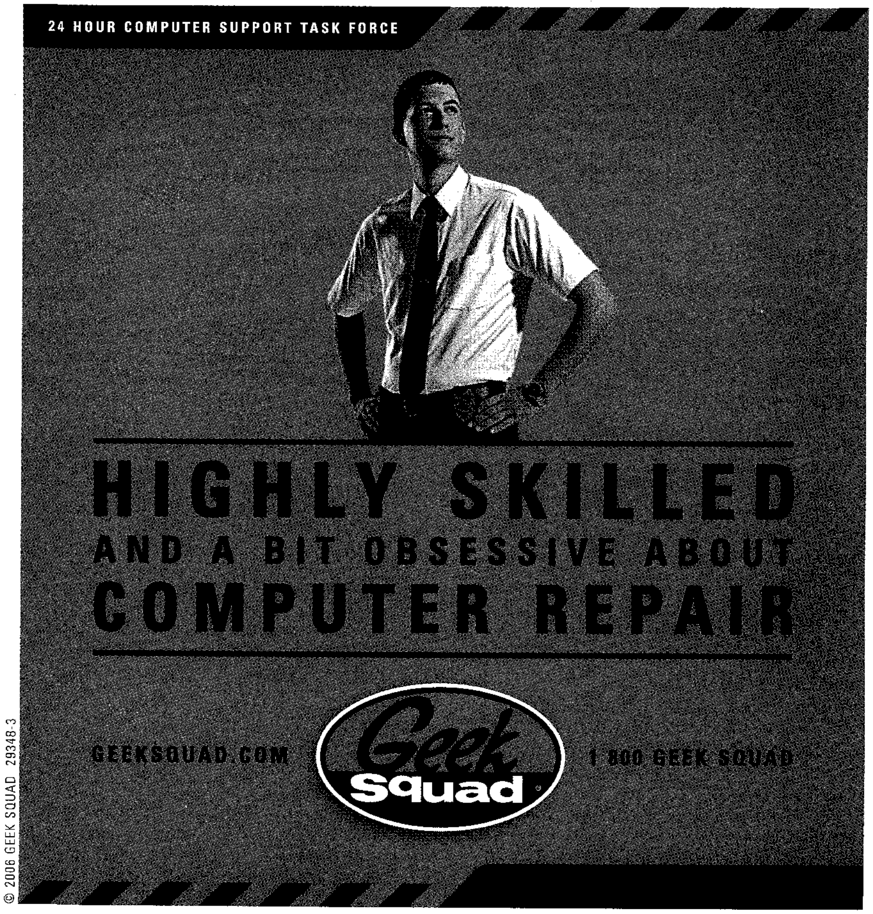

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OVER!
IF YOU WANT IT
Happy Christmas from John & Yoko

In the documentary "The U.S. vs. John Lennon," the pop idol faces deportation.

COURTESY GETTY IMAGES

MOVIES OPENING

AL FRANKEN: GOD SPOKE
A documentary that follows the comedian turned commentator during and after the 2004 Presidential campaign. Opening Sept. 13. (IFC Center.)

AURORA BOREALIS
In this drama, directed by James Burke, a young man from Minneapolis (Joshua Jackson) attempts to cope with the death of his father. Opening Sept. 15. (Empire 25 and Village East Cinemas.)

THE BLACK DAHLIA
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Sept. 15. (In wide release.)

CONFETTI
A mock documentary by Deborah Isitt, about three couples competing for a magazine's Most Original Wedding award. Opening Sept. 15. (In wide release.)

EVERYONE'S HERO
An animated drama about a boy who goes to New York alone to return Babe Ruth's bat. Directed by Colin Brady, Christopher Reeve, and Dan St. Pierre. Opening Sept. 15. (In wide release.)

GRIDIRON GANG
The Rock stars in this drama, about troubled teens who form a football team. Directed by Phil Joanou. Opening Sept. 15. (In wide release.)

THE GROUND TRUTH
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Sept. 15. (Sunshine Cinema.)

HAVEN
Orlando Bloom stars in this drama of love and deceit on the Cayman Islands, written and directed by Frank E. Flowers. Opening Sept. 15. (42nd Street E Walk and Village East Cinemas.)

KEEPING MUM
Rowan Atkinson and Kristin Scott Thomas star in this comedy about a clergyman and his philandering wife. Directed by Niall Johnson. Opening Sept. 15. (Beekman and Chelsea Cinemas.)

THE LAST KISS
Tony Goldwyn directed this remake of "L'Ultimo Baccio," a romantic comedy about a couple on the edge, starring Zach Braff and Jacinda Barrett. Opening Sept. 15. (In wide release.)

THE U.S. VS. JOHN LENNON
A documentary, directed by David Leaf and John Scheinfeld, about the musician's political activities. Opening Sept. 15. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

CRANK
A hyperactive Jason Statham continues his rise to stardom in this action drama, about a poisoned hit man racing around L.A. to find an antidote. The film, written and directed by Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor, careens around town as Statham's character tracks down the bad guys, rescues his girlfriend (Amy Smart), and chugs down all manner of energy supplements to keep his buzz alive (in the "Speed"-meets-"D.O.A." premise, he dies if his adrenaline drops). The relentless editing and needless sadism substitute for any intriguing visceral jolts, but Statham delivers a lively performance; he easily outruns the film.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

L'ENFANCE NUE
The naked childhood of the title of Maurice Pialat's first feature film, from 1968, is one stripped of sentimental illusions. Ten-year-old François (Michel Terrazon), in foster care in France's rugged industrial north, kills the family cat and is sent back to the state agency that placed him. An elderly couple takes him in, but his unremitting acts of malice escalate into a dangerously destructive game. Pialat views these doings with a blank, pugnacious glare akin to François's own, and, as his identification with the emotionally stunted youth and contempt for the boy's victims suggests, the borrowings from his own cold-hearted childhood were in no way cathartic. The film plays like the work of a bitterly angry man, and, indeed, the set was a battleground for cast and crew. The resulting four-hour yawp of fury was cut down to this eighty-three-minute glint of menace. Co-produced by François Truffaut, to whose "400 Blows" this film is perhaps the only worthy successor.—*Richard Brody* (MOMA; Sept. 14 and Sept. 17.)

FACTOTUM
A fine, unflustered attempt by the Norwegian director Bent Hamer—previously responsible for the trance-inducing "Kitchen Stories"—to make visual sense of the world according to Charles Bukowski. The movie, scripted by Hamer and Jim Stark, is adapted from Bukowski's semiautobiographical "Factotum" and other writings, and it maintains his uneasy balance between fury and indolence; we can never be sure, from one scene to the next, whether Henry Chinaski (Matt Dillon) is going to lie around or lash out. The story is too steeped in alcohol to support a sober plot: Chinaski weaves from one job to the next, and from the ravenous Jan (Lili Taylor) to the more languorous Laura (Marisa Tomei), both as boozed up as himself. Without Dillon, the film would slip down too easily; he lends it both mellowness and bite, and the underwater slowness of his movements, like the deep murmur of his voice-overs, convincingly renders a soul who, while often laughable, refuses to be utterly lost.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 8/28/06.) (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

HALF NELSON
The young Canadian actor Ryan Gosling is quietly charismatic as Dan Dunne, a schoolteacher in a tough section of Brooklyn who knows how to teach history to his thirteen- and fourteen-year-old African-American students. Dunne is smart and dedicated, but he's also freebasing cocaine. When a girl in his class, Drey (Shareeka Epps), catches him in the act, a bond develops between them. The movie, made with a handheld camera by the team of Ryan Fleck and Anna Boden, is alert to the tensions in the two characters' lives and the raffish neighborhood milieu, but one comes away from it thinking that the filmmakers have coddled their hero. He is, after all, failing not only himself but the students who depend on him. The sources of Dunne's addiction are obscure, but "Half Nelson" nevertheless builds his problems into a parable of the misfortunes of liberalism.—*David Denby* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

HOLLYWOODLAND
Allen Coulter's mystery movie is itself hard to unpack: part period drama, part open-ended thriller, it pays uneasy homage to a bad dream of stardom. Ben Affleck plays George Reeves, a cheerful hulk of the nineteen-fifties, who was unable to repeat on the big screen his popular triumph as Superman on the small one. Diane Lane turns in yet another fine performance, at once strong-minded and easily bruised, in the role of Reeves's older married lover. Reeves's death, in 1959, has long been one of the minor enigmas of Hollywood, and we duly follow a fictional detective (Adrien Brody) as he tries, and fails, to deliver a clear solution. The problem is not just that Brody seems too reedy and gentle for a private eye but that the aftermath of Reeves's career is no match for the brief and glamorous flare of the living man. In the end, the movie

belongs to Lane, for her portrait of a beautiful woman mounting a wry, doomed defense against the abrasions of time. With Bob Hoskins as her husband, a doting, cuckolded thug.—*A.L.* (9/11/06) (In wide release.)

THE ILLUSIONIST

Edward Norton as a master magician of plebeian origin in late-nineteenth-century imperial Austria, Jessica Biel as the young duchess he's in love with, Rufus Sewell as the smart but sadistic crown prince who wants to marry the duchess and take over the empire, and Paul Giamatti as the police inspector who is loyal to the prince but fascinated by the magician. Unconvincing controversy over whether the magician's playing with the relation of reality to illusion constitutes a political threat to the empire or just a threat to the prince's romantic ambitions; intelligent, beautifully photographed production in rather dry, very delicate color (Dick Pope is the cinematographer), but, all in all, a great deal of craftsmanship wasted over nothing. Directed by Neil Burger; based (sort of) on a story by Steven Millhauser.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

THE LAST COMMAND

For his fourth feature, from 1928, Josef von Sternberg told a tale of two revolutions, Communist and cinematic. A former general in the czar's army, now eking out a living as a Hollywood extra, is cast as a Russian general in a First World War drama that is directed by a Soviet émigré director he had once known—from across the battle lines of the revolution. In costume, he muses on his years in uniform, and the last days of imperial Russia unfurl as an hour-long flashback. Though Sternberg caricatures the revolutionaries' vulgarity and cruelty, he is as biliously satirical toward the upstarts of Hollywood: his analogy between a movie set and a battlefield turns into perverse psychodrama through the make-believe general's real-life recollections. It is dreadful to imagine what Sternberg, who was all of thirty-four, must have suffered to be able to stage humiliation with such piercing discernment. The general is played by the titanic Emil Jannings (who soon after chose Sternberg to direct him in "The Blue Angel"); the suavely cynical director is William Powell; Evelyn Brent is the passionate Bolshevik who once came between them. Silent.—*R.B.* (Moving Image; Sept. 17.)

LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE

A charming, independently made family comedy about a winner-take-all society—America—that is driving its citizens crazy. Its hero and victim, Richard Hoover (Greg Kinnear), is a motivational speaker who has invented a nine-step program for success. His seven-year-old daughter, Olive (Abigail Breslin), is entering a Little Miss Sunshine contest; his stepson, Dwayne (Paul Dano), has a private dream in which he is a Nietzschean Übermensch; his wife's brother (Steve Carell), whom the family has taken in, is the No. 1 Proust scholar in the country but has made a fool of himself over a male graduate student who has leaped into the bed of the No. 2 Proust scholar. Is winning everything? The writer, Michael Arndt, and the husband-and-wife directing team, Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, narrowly avoid the family-comedy pitfalls of whimsy and mush, but Arndt has a good ear for domestic irritations and the acting is just tough enough to keep us off balance. With Alan Arkin and Toni Collette as the family's realists.—*D.D.* (7/31/06) (In wide release.)

MADAME DUBARRY

Today this silent spectacle from 1919 is little seen, but Ernst Lubitsch's exuberant, turbulent French court epic about Louis XV's lover—and her fate when the aristocracy falls—was a sensation in both Berlin and New York. It established the young director as a master craftsman with a warm, generous knowingness and a fondness for dark-haired beauties with dramatic eyes and rosebud mouths. Pola Negri's Madame DuBarry is an ideal Lubitsch antiheroine: a working-class scrambler and outsider who learns that in Paris you do as the Parisians do. Even when Emil Jannings's overbearingly sensual Louis XV kisses her toes and clips her fingernails, she remains, to her peril, a happy, amoral girl playing sexual hopscotch. At the height of her success, she may grow capricious and put on airs, but until the closing shots she never loses her bond with the audience. Only the guillotine severs that connection, in the climactic sequence notable for its mingling of excitement, compassion, and precision. Silent.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; Sept. 18.)

RIDING ALONE FOR THOUSANDS OF MILES

The director Zhang Yimou returns to the allegorical drama in this simple but at times trenchantly emotional tale of Takada (the excellent Ken Takakura), a widowed Japanese fisherman. In order to win the respect of his estranged son, who is gravely ill, Takada journeys to Yunnan, China, where, unable to speak the language, he attempts to film a Chinese folk opera that was his son's passion. It turns out that the actor he wants is in jail, and a series of events leads him to the actor's bastard son in a remote village. Despite the sentimental context, Zhang calmly insinuates a soft condemnation of authoritarian usurpation of the individual's right to make choices. Although Zhang cloyingly overexplains, in a voice-over, circumstances that unfold clearly enough onscreen, what is there is quite beautiful. The cinematography of uninhabited mountain vistas is stunning, the supporting characters are charming, and Takakura stoically portrays the pained patience with which Takada undertakes his stubborn quest. In Mandarin and Japanese.—*Shauna Lyon* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

SHERRYBABY

Maggie Gyllenhaal gives an intelligent, brave performance in Laurie Collyer's film, which is based on the true story of Sherry Swanson, a recovering heroin addict. Just out of prison, Sherry returns to her home town, in New Jersey, where she finds her five-year-old daughter, Alexis, living comfortably with her brother and sister-in-law. Gyllenhaal nails the anger, the neediness, and the mercurial mood swings of an addict, proficiently rising above the otherwise bland filmmaking in this Sundance-endorsed indie. There are smart moments, such as a sex scene immediately upon Sherry's arrival at a halfway house, and telling interactions with her bemused but adaptable daughter. But the relentlessness of the cycle of abuse and the suggestion that every male in her orbit is after only one thing become wearying, and lack the ring of truth that Gyllenhaal so meticulously achieves with her persuasive performance.—*S.L.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

SNAKES ON A PLANE

They bite the passengers on the neck, the chest, the eyes, and even more vulnerable places; they slither into the cockpit, wrap themselves around oxygen masks, and investigate the underclothes of a middle-aged woman. A nonpoisonous snake—a boa constrictor—eats a dog and an Englishman. Last fall, when the title was announced, it was obvious that the movie was nothing more than a marketing concept. Quickly, a giddy atmosphere developed on the Internet; the movie became the subject of songs, mock trailers, merchandising contests, and Pennsylvania Dutch quilting bees. The audience decided to sell "Snakes" to itself, and that became the event. In all other ways, the movie is a routine exploitation movie, with rather alarmingly high-tech production values. Since the story doesn't make any sense, the moviegoer is reduced to the sordid task of admiring the smooth way a digital snake crawls out of a dead person's mouth. With Samuel L. Jackson, who is so angry and clenched that he falls to the level of the material. Directed by David R. Ellis.—*D.D.* (9/4/06) (In wide release.)

THIS FILM IS NOT YET RATED

Kirby Dick's new documentary takes on the Motion Picture Association of America, and, in particular, the power of its ratings board to tell us which words, activities, and body parts we should or should not, as moviegoers, be allowed to consume. This is a tempting subject, and the punches launched by Dick and some of his contributors, including John Waters, Kimberly Peirce, and Kevin Smith, hit home. At times, however, the movie starts to flail; brief glances at the Hollywood blacklist and the photographic evidence from Abu Ghraib tend to confuse rather than propel the argument. The neatest gambit is Dick's hiring of a private investigator to trace and name the members of both the ratings board and the subsequent appeals tribunal, all of whom have until now retained their anonymity. Much of the film may be a wasted opportunity, but few will question Dick's demand for transparency from those who sit and frown in judgment on what we watch.—*A.L.* (8/28/06) (IFC Center.)

TABLES FOR TWO
CHINATOWN BRASSERIE

380 Lafayette St., at Great Jones St. (212-533-7000)—The cavernous NoHo space formerly occupied by Time Café now drips with chinoiserie: fringed lanterns, brocade panelling, lacquered everything. Chinatown Brasserie, the new tenant, has fancy food and frothy drinks: it's Ruby Foo's without the tourists, or Mr. Chow's with a lot more camp and only slightly less attitude. (The management is trying hard to cultivate the appearance of popularity, and if that means making people wait at the bar before they are seated at one of several empty tables, so be it: the frozen mai tais are arguably the restaurant's best offering.) Downstairs, the late, lamented Fez night club has been tricked out in a style best described as Shanghai Rat Pack, including leopard-print carpeting, white vinyl swivel stools, gilded pillars, and a koi pond.

The menu is dominated by American Chinese-restaurant classics. Peking duck—the centerpiece—has a dark, burnished glaze and crackly skin, and is delicious. Several other standards have Southeast Asian touches that work nicely, like the hint of lemongrass in the wonton soup. The branzino, which is steamed with ginger, scallions, and pickled plums, then beheaded at the table, is tender and subtly tart, but the chicken with mushrooms is sodden and salty. It might make respectable takeout, but at these prices, with the disposable chopsticks and the colonialist-fantasia decor, it is cloying.

Daytime is a completely different story. The extensive dim-sum offerings are comparable to what you'd find in the real Chinatown, but thoroughly sanitized, and at several times the price. Steamed pork buns are tiny but perfect: the dough is fresh and springy, with generous chunks of savory pork inside. The pot stickers, which are flavored with ginger, are surprisingly delicate, but the broth inside the soup dumplings is syrupy and repellently sweet. The atmosphere is nothing like the dim-sum experience to be had a mile to the south—no steaming carts bearing surprises, no free tea, no live poultry or counterfeit purses outside—but perhaps that is the point. At midday on a recent Saturday, as the "Sex and the City" theme song played insistently but incongruously in the background, three nearby tables were populated by twentysomethings who had brought their grandparents. (Open daily for dinner and weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées $15-$48.)

—*Kate Julian*

WORLD TRADE CENTER
Rushing downtown on the morning of September 11, 2001, a group of Port Authority cops, including Sergeant John McLoughlin (Nicolas Cage) and the rookie Will Jimeno (Michael Peña), encounter a hallucinatory storm of paper drifting down from the Twin Towers. Later, trapped in the rubble of the collapsing buildings, McLoughlin and Jimeno provide each other with whatever support and consolation they are capable of, while, at home, their families respond to the catastrophe and their uncertainty about the men with convincing degrees of fear, bravado, panic, and rage. Oliver Stone's aesthetically conservative 9/11 movie is a work of considerable power that captures the oppressive physical strangeness and exhausting emotional demands of that day.—*D.D.* (8/21/06) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

THE COVENANT: In wide release. **HOW TO EAT FRIED WORMS:** In wide release. **INVINCIBLE:** In wide release. **PAPER DOLLS:** Film Forum. **THE WICKER MAN:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"New-Filmmakers Presents." Sept. 13 at 8:30: "My Brother's War" (2005, Whitney Hamilton). ♦ "Trash-Picking & Eye-Popping," programs of found footage from educational, industrial, and oddball movies. Sept. 14 at 8: Damaged reels. ♦ Sept. 15 at 8: "Psychoactive Cinema." ♦ Sept. 16 at 7: Films from the Orgone Archive, Pittsburgh. ♦ Sept. 17 at 7: "AV Geeks Greatest Hits."

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—The films of Jean-Claude Carrière. Sept. 13 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Diary of a Chambermaid" (1964, Luis Buñuel; in French). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a discussion with the critic Elliott Stein. ♦ Sept. 14 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Taking Off" (1971, Milos Forman). ♦ Sept. 16 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Belle de Jour" (1967, Luis Buñuel; in French). ♦ Sept. 17 at 3, 6, and 9: "The Tin Drum" (1979, Volker Schlöndorff; in German). ♦ The films of Lech Kowalski. Sept. 19 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "On Hitler's Highway" (2002).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—The films of Kenji Mizoguchi. All films are in Japanese. Sept. 13-14 at 1:15, 3:10, 5:05, 7, and 9: "Ugetsu" (1953). ♦ Sept. 15-16 at 1, 3:20, 5:40, 8, and 10:15: "Sansho the Bailiff" (1954). ♦ Sept. 17 at 1, 3:35, 6:10, and 8:45: "The Life of Oharu" (1952). ♦ Sept. 19 at 1, 3:40, 6:20, and 9: "The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums" (1939). ♦ The films of Buster Keaton. All films are silent. Sept. 18 at 1:45, 4:40, 7:35, and 10:30: "Our Hospitality" (1923). ♦ Sept. 18 at 3:20, 6:15, and 9:10: "Cops" (1922), "The Playhouse" (1922), and "Convict 13" (1920).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Special screenings. Sept. 13 and Sept. 15 at 8 and 10: "Al Franken: God Spoke" (2006, Nick Doob and Chris Hegedus), introduced by the directors, Franken, and the executive producer, D. A. Pennebaker. ♦ Sept. 14 at 8: "Four Eyed Monsters" (2006, Arin Crumley and Susan Buice). ♦ Sept. 18 at 7: "Showgirls" (1995, Paul Verhoeven), followed by a discussion with the journalist Michael Musto and the screenwriter Joe Eszterhas. ♦ The films of Akira Kurosawa. Sept. 15-17 at noon: "High and Low" (1963; in Japanese). ♦ Sept. 18 at 7: "Angelo My Love" (1983) and "Assassination Tango" (2002), presented by the musician Will Oldham. ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Sept. 15-16: "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" (1992, Fran Rubel Kuzui).

LINCOLN PLAZA CINEMAS
Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280)—The films of Pedro Almodóvar. Call for show times. Sept. 13-14: "The Flower of My Secret" (1995; in Spanish). ♦ Sept. 15-19: "Live Flesh" (1997; in Spanish).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Another Wave: Global Queer Cinema, Part Two." Sept. 14 at 8:15 and Sept. 15 at 6: "Memento Mori," short films by Jim Hubbard. ♦ The Huston Family: 75 Years on Film." Sept. 13 at 8:30: "Fat City" (1972, John Huston). ♦ Sept. 16 at 2: "Law and Order" (1932, Edward L. Cahn). ♦ Sept. 16 at 4: "The African Queen" (1951, John Huston). ♦ Sept. 16 at 7: "Beat the Devil" (1954, John Huston). ♦ Sept. 17 at 1:30: "Bastard Out of Carolina" (1996, Anjelica Huston). ♦ Sept. 17 at 1:30: "The Night of the Iguana" (1964, John Huston). ♦ Sept. 17 at 3:30: "Agnes Browne" (1999, Anjelica Huston). ♦ Sept. 17 at 5:30: "The Dead" (1987, John Huston) and "John Huston and the Dubliners" (1988, Lilyan Sievernich). ♦ Sept. 18 at 6:30: "A House Divided" (1931, William Wyler). ♦ Sept. 18 at 8: "Chinatown" (1974, Roman Polanski). ♦ "Prix Jean Vigo." All films are in French. Sept. 14 at 6:45 and Sept. 17 at 4: "L'Enfance Nue" (†). ♦ Sept. 14 at 8:30 and Sept. 16 at 4:30: "I'm Not Afraid of Life" (1999, Noémie Lvovsky) and "The Break" (2003, Nathalie Loubeyre). The Sept. 14 screening will be introduced by Loubeyre. ♦ Sept. 15 and Sept. 17 at 6: "Bako, the Other Shore" (1978, Jacques Champreux). The Sept. 15 screening will be introduced by the director. ♦ Sept. 15 at 8:30 and Sept. 16 at 7:30: "Repeated Absences" (1972, Guy Gilles). ♦ The films of Pola Negri. Sept. 18 at 6: "Madame DuBarry" (†) and an excerpt from "Carmen" (1918, Lubitsch; silent). ♦ Sept. 18 at 8:15: "Life Is a Dream in Cinema: Pola Negri" (2006, Mariusz Kotowski), introduced by the director and Eli Wallach.

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Preview screenings. Sept. 15 at 7 and 9:30: "A Guide to Recognizing Your Saints" (2006, Dito Montiel), introduced by the director. ♦ Sept. 17 at 7: "The Last King of Scotland" (2006, Kevin Macdonald), introduced by the director, Forest Whitaker, and James McAvoy. ♦ Through Oct. 8: The films of Josef von Sternberg. Sept. 16 at 3: "The Salvation Hunters" (1925; silent). ♦ Sept. 17 at 2: "The Last Command" (†). ♦ Sept. 17 at 4:30: "The Docks of New York" (1928; silent).

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In première. Sept. 13 at 9 and Sept. 15 at 11: "Satellite" (2006, Jeff Winner). ♦ Sept. 14 at 7: "Getting Out" (2004, George Stoney). ♦ In revival. Sept. 15 at 7: "Dr. Strangelove" (1964, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ Sept. 16 at 11: "Easy Rider" (1969, Dennis Hopper).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Sept. 15-16: "Mean Streets" (1973, Martin Scorsese).

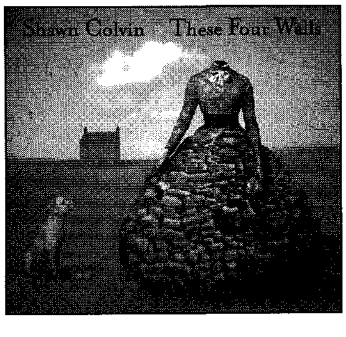
THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"The Supporting Cast: As Bright As the Stars." Sept. 17 and Sept. 19 at 5: "Rear Window" (1954, Alfred Hitchcock). ♦ Sept. 17 and Sept. 19 at 7: "On the Waterfront" (1954, Elia Kazan).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"Latin Beat." Except where noted, all films are in Spanish. Sept. 13 at 1 and 9: "Maroa" (2005, Solveig Hoogesteijin). ♦ Sept. 13 at 3:15: "Say Good Morning to Dad" (2004, Fernando Vargas Villazón). ♦ Sept. 14 at 1 and 8:30: "To the Other Side" (2004, Gustavo Loza). ♦ Sept. 16 at 2: "A Little Princess" (1995, Cuarón; in English). ♦ Sept. 16 at 6:30: "Love in the Time of Hysteria" (1992, Cuarón), introduced by the director. ♦ Sept. 16 at 9 and Sept. 17 at 4: "Y Tu Mamá También" (2001, Cuarón), introduced by the director. ♦ Sept. 17 at 9: "Canoa" (1976, Felipe Cazals), introduced by the director and Cuarón. ♦ Sept. 18 at 2: "Mi Mambo!" (2006, Pat Jaffe and Molly McBride; in English and Spanish). ♦ Sept. 19 at 6:30: "For Rent" (2005, Alberto Fuguet), followed by a Q. & A. with the director.

MAURICE VELLEKOOP

Words on Music

Borders music expert David LeMaire says:
"This album's depth, wit and intelligence shines on every track. Colvin has a singular talent for crafting smart yet catchy tunes, and her voice – one of the finest in pop music today – is in top form."


Shawn Colvin These Four Walls

"A gifted singer-songwriter with a voice delivered straight from heaven."
The Washington Post

These Four Walls is three-time Grammy winner Shawn Colvin's first album of all-new material in five years. Recorded in New York and Austin, it was produced by longtime collaborator John Leventhal.

On tour in October and November.

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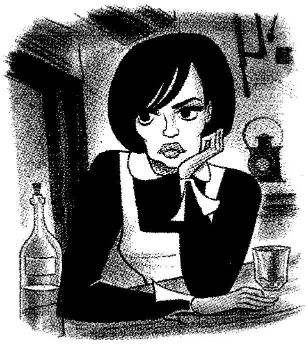
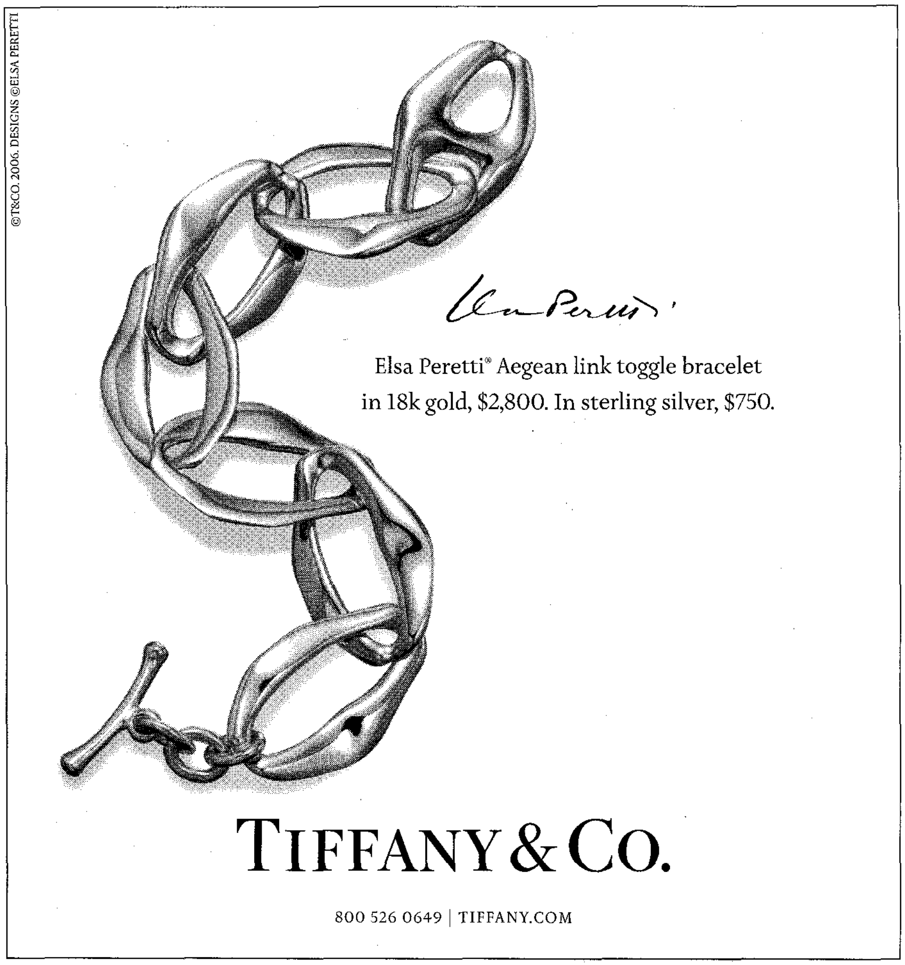
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
THE WRITE STUFF

In 1963, the Spanish-born filmmaker Luis Buñuel was looking for a French collaborator, and he selected Jean-Claude Carrière, a young novelist and screenwriter who had grown up on a farm in the South of France. Together they adapted Octave Mirbeau's novel "The Diary of a Chambermaid," the first of six exhilarating movies they made together, including the masterpieces "Belle de Jour" and "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie." In Carrière's estimate, over a period of twenty years the two men shared more than two thousand meals. Carrière has also had time for a few other things, including writing for the stage, teaching, and creative partnerships with such directors as Jean-Luc Godard, Andrzej Wajda, and Nagisa Oshima. BAM's series devoted to Carrière's career (Sept. 13-27) kicks off with "Chambermaid," in which Carrière tightened the fragmented diary entries of Mirbeau's novel into an organic portrait of a country manor held together by the perversity of desire. He appears in the film as a priest instructing a sexually inquiring woman, "Il y a caresse. . . . et caresse."



—*David Denby*



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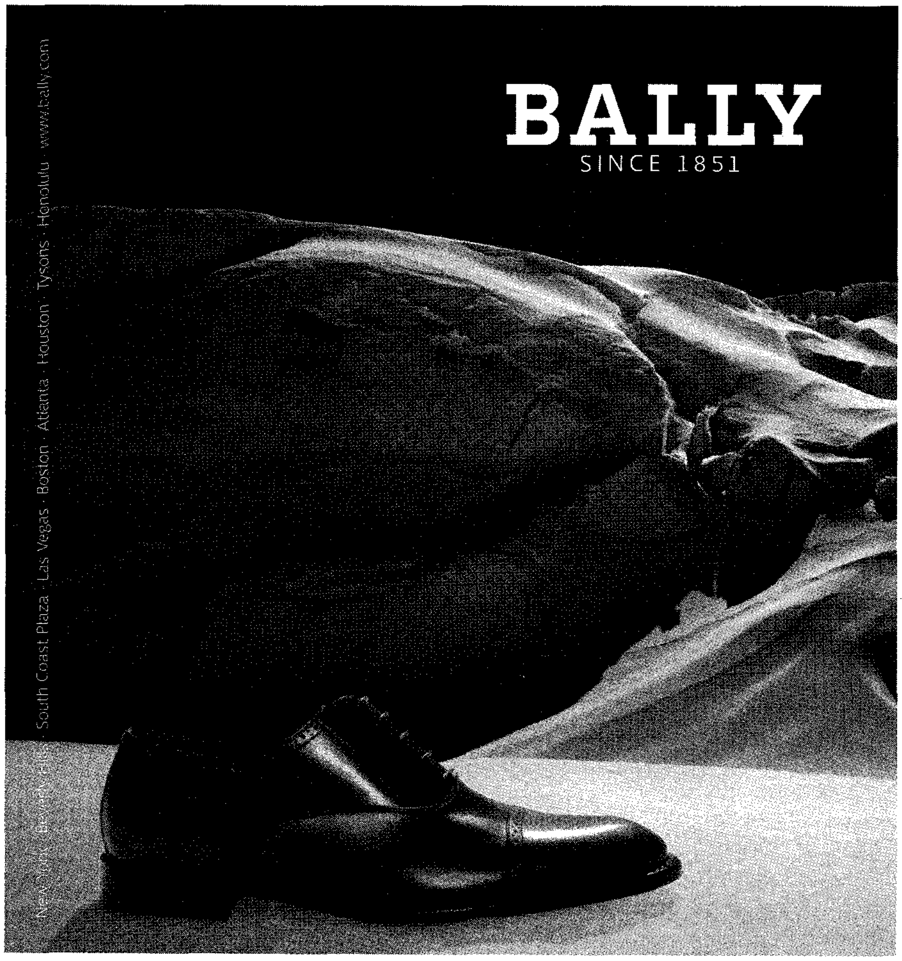

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READINGS AND TALKS

"FORGOTTEN AND FORLORN"
This three-week series of lectures looks at the past (and the future) of New York City's defunct hospitals, asylums, and quarantine sites. There are three talks, starting on Sept. 12; the final one, on Sept. 23 at 10 A.M., includes a rare guided tour of the Ellis Island hospital complex, which has been closed to the public since 1954. (General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, 20 W. 44th St. For more information, and details about the tour, call 212-614-9107.)

NEWT GINGRICH
The former Speaker of the House elaborates on his book "Winning the Future: A 21st Century Contract with America," which came out last year. The New School's president, Bob Kerrey, will lead the discussion following Gingrich's presentation. (The New School, 66 W. 12th St. For more information, call 212-229-5400, ext. 1482. Sept. 13 at 6.)

GITA MEHTA
The author discusses her latest book, "Eternal Ganesha," with the Asian-art expert Kathryn Selig Brown. (Rubin Museum of Art, 150 W. 17th St. 212-620-5000, ext. 344. Sept. 13 at 7.)

HAPPY ENDING MUSIC AND READING SERIES
The fiction writers Deb Olin Unferth, Scott Snyder, and Adam Haslett join the singer-songwriter Katell Keineg. (302 Broome St. 212-334-9676. Sept. 13 at 8.)

"LITPAC"
This new, semi-monthly reading series intends to be a fund-raiser for progressive congressional candidates. Jonathan Lethem, Nick Flynn, Jennifer Egan, and Martha Southgate do the honors on Sept. 18 at 7. (Housing Works Bookstore Café, 126 Crosby St. 212-334-3324.)

DONALD HALL
The poet laureate of the United States talks about poetry in America and reads from his latest collection, "White Apples and the Taste of Stone." (Graduate Center, City University of New York, Fifth Ave. at 34th St. For more information, call 212-817-2005. Sept. 19 at 6:30.)

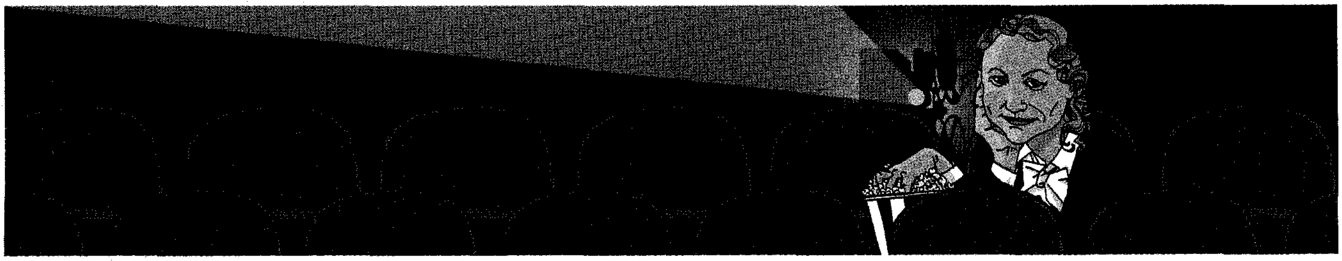
"CRITICS AND THE ARTS"
Wendy Lesser, the editor of *The Threepenny Review*, moderates a discussion with the rock writer Greil Marcus, the *New York* magazine art critic Mark Stevens, and Joan Acocella and Alex Ross, the dance and classical-music critics, respectively, for this magazine. (Lang Recital Hall, Hunter College, 69th St. between Park and Lexington Aves. Sept. 19 at 7. No tickets necessary.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

INDEPENDENT FILM WEEK
Since 1979, the Independent Feature Project has sponsored a market each autumn to help filmmakers connect with distributors and festival programmers. This year, the I.F.P. opens the festivities to the public, starting on Sept. 13 at 6:30 with a panel discussion at the Walter Reade Theatre featuring the directors Catherine Hardwicke, Peter Sollett, and Dito Montiel, moderated by David Carr, of the *Times*. From Sept. 17 to Sept. 21, a series of conferences on independent film production will be held at the Puck Building (293 Lafayette St.), including a conversation with Guy Maddin, a discussion with the director Tom DiCillo and the cinematographer Frank DeMarco, and a roundtable focussing on the major role played by Netflix in the indie world. (For more information, visit www.independentfilmweek.org.)

"KNIT OUT"
This annual gathering in Union Square Park offers the city's knitting fans a chance to enjoy their passion out in the open. Experts will offer tips, speed knitters will compete for prizes, and participants of all skill levels will proudly display their scarves, sweaters, and caps. (Sept. 17, from noon to 5. For more information, visit www.knit-out.com.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
The new and the not so new mingle at **Christie's** "First Open" sale (Sept. 13), a category inaugurated last year to draw in younger collectors with "next generation" names like Barnaby Furnas and Martin Eder, along with mid-priced works by such contemporary mainstays as Warhol, Hirst, and Barney. A selection of wines from a remarkable private collection, with vintages dating back to 1784, is offered on Sept. 16; Asia Week begins on Sept. 19 with an auction of Chinese ceramics and works of art, including an exquisite archaic jade beaker, incised with delicate abstract designs. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Sotheby's** offers a new set of pieces from the collection of the 7-Eleven Corporation in its latest auction of American paintings (Sept. 13); this selection includes works by cowboy artists such as Bill Owen and James Reynolds. All eyes turn eastward for the house's week of Asian sales, which opens with Indian art (Sept. 19), including modern paintings—by Tyeb Mehta, Francis Newton Souza, and Ram Kumar, among other leading artists—and numerous lots of colorful and intricate eighteenth-century miniatures from the Punjab Hills schools. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)



JASHAR AWAN

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
FRANCO-AMERICAN
Oct. 2-11

The clothing designer Agnès B. is a cinephile whose production company, Love Streams—named for a John Cassavetes film—produced Patrice Chéreau's "Gabrielle." For "J'aime le Cinéma Américain," at BAM, she chose nine American films, and her selections are enticingly eclectic, ranging from Buster Keaton's "Seven Chances" and Cassavetes's "Too Late Blues" to Harmony Korine's "Julien Donkey-Boy." (718-636-4100.)

ART
BRONX CHEER
Oct. 7

The craze for expanding and improving art museums has hit the outer boroughs, too: the Bronx Museum of the Arts has been closed while a dramatic new wing in glass and steel, designed by Arquitectonica, which is based in New York and Miami, was added to its old home on the Grand Concourse. The museum reopens with "Tropicália: A Revolution in Brazilian Culture," a show of art works and participatory events that has already been at the Barbican in London. (718-681-6000.)

NIGHT LIFE
NEWMAN'S OWN
Oct. 11

The iconic songwriter and longtime Los Angeles resident Randy Newman stops by Carnegie Hall for a solo show. (212-247-7800.)

THE THEATRE
SUPERCALIFRAGILISTIC
Oct. 14

The acclaimed West End production of "Mary Poppins" comes to the New Amsterdam Theatre. Based on the original books by P. L. Travers and the 1964 film starring Julie Andrews, the musical features some new music and lyrics by George Stiles and Anthony Drewe (there are eight new songs, along with several old favorites by Richard M. and Robert B. Sherman) and a book by Julian Fellowes. (212-307-4747.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
ALL OF LUDWIG
Oct. 15

Pieter Wispelwey, a cellist of rare intensity and insight, rounds out a Beethoven festival with a marathon concert of all the composer's music for cello and piano, at Alice Tully Hall. (212-721-6500.)

Agnès B. selects films for a series at BAM.

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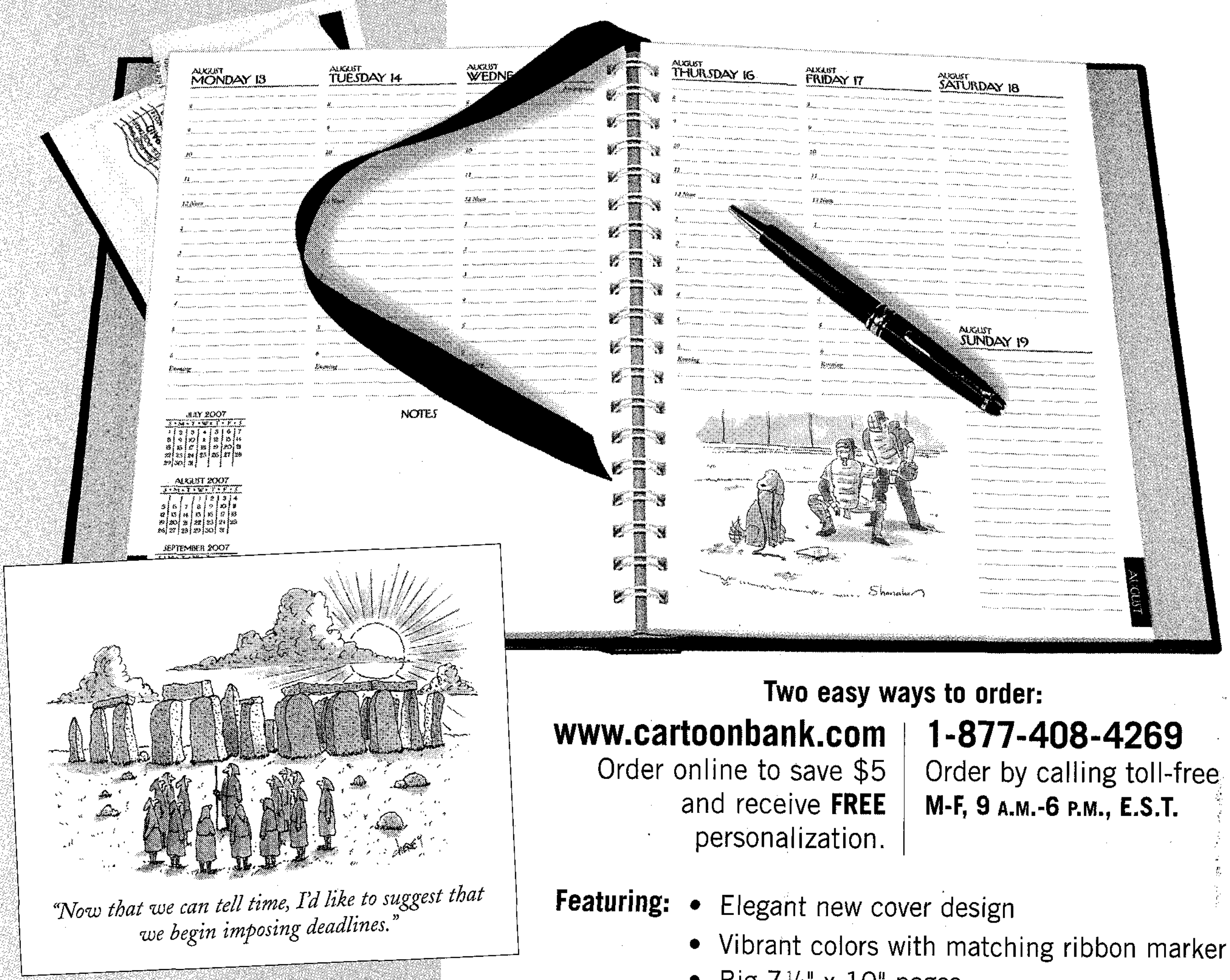
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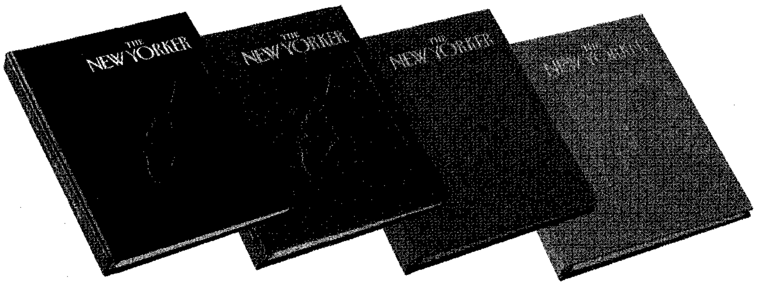
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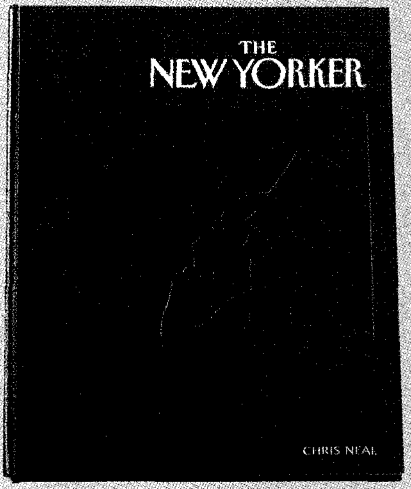
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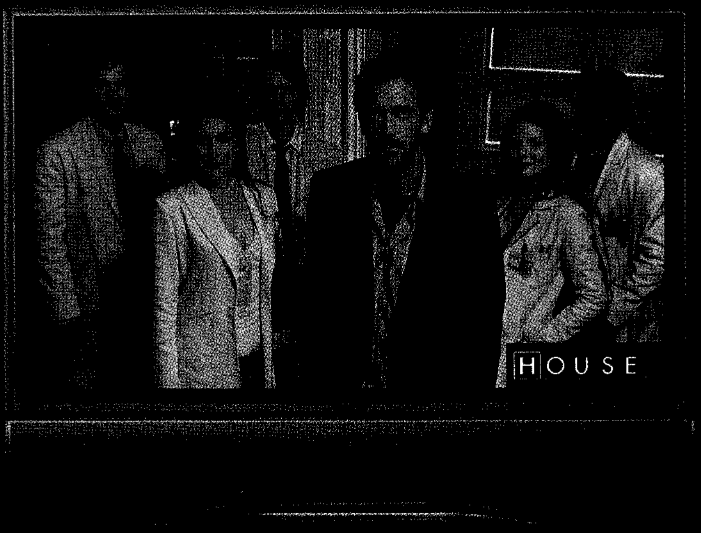

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The medical drama is one of television's most popular and enduring formats. With a series as dramatic and visceral as Fox TV's "House," the settings must communicate its distinctive qualities without competing with the actors for attention. That's the challenge for "House" **Production Designer Derek R. Hill**, recently nominated for a 2006 Emmy Award in Outstanding Art Direction for a Single-Camera Series. The final installment of this three-part Q&A will appear in next week's issue.

Derek R. Hill

What approach do you take to designing sets on "House?"

HILL: Coming from a film background, I never say, "It's only TV." I strive to give the show the best and the biggest look from the teaser to the end.

What's unique about the look of the hospital?

HILL: I steer away from a standard, sterile hospital look—the two-tone hallways, rooms right and left. Instead we have a lot of glass, including the doors to patient rooms. It looks fresher and more contemporary.

How do you make the medical spaces look so credible?

HILL: We use real devices and design a real room around the equipment. Whether it's an MRI, a PET scan, or a large X-ray machine, it's the latest medical equipment. We won't put a sleek, high-tech machine in a dated-looking room.

Does knowing the show is broadcast in HDTV affect your work?

HILL: In the old days, you might have been able to fool some viewers. With the clarity and sharpness you get with HDTV, you can't fool them anymore. So I give directors a full set to work with; there are four sides to every set and all the walls are finished. It allows them to use the full area, and the audience benefits by feeling they're viewing a real space.

Are there details a viewer seeing the show in HDTV might catch that one watching on an older set might miss?

HILL: No detail goes unnoticed with HDTV. For example, we use real paintings on the walls as hospital décor. When an actor is standing near one, with HDTV you will the see brushstrokes in the painting.

Has HDTV affected your profession?

HILL: Thanks to the quality of the work you can produce, HDTV is attracting big-name designers and directors who previously would only work on film.

What's your home theatre like?

HILL: I have a 65-inch HDTV with a full surround sound system so I can experience "House" in the best quality possible.

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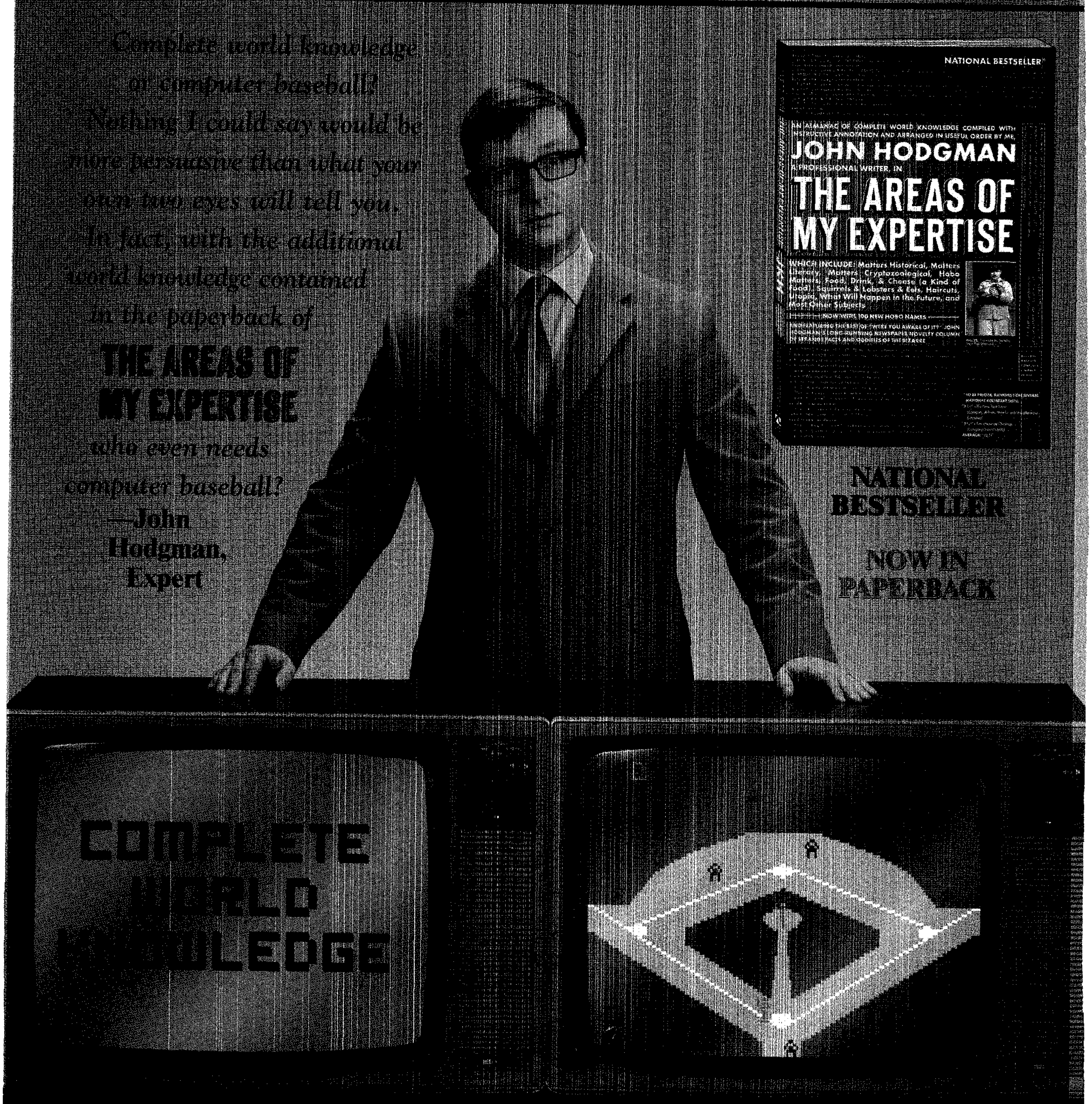
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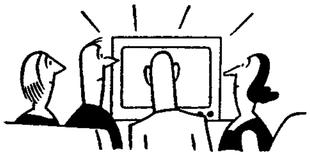
THE NEW YORKER

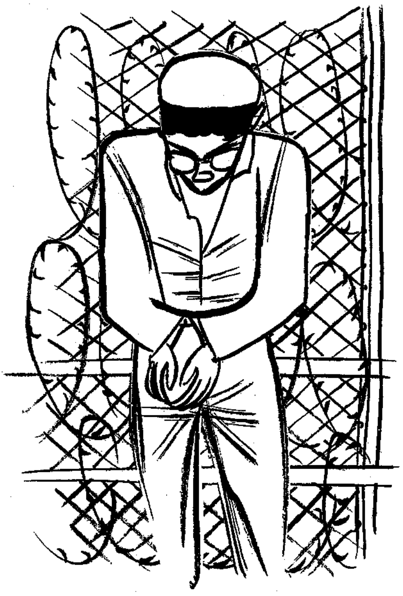
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
PRISONERS



If only political jujitsu were a useful weapon in the war on terror, the President's speech last Wednesday, in the East Room of the White House, would have struck a powerful blow on behalf of what he called "the cause of humanity, against those who seek to impose the darkness of tyranny and terror upon the entire world." In just thirty-seven minutes, he changed the subject from Iraq to terrorism, flummoxing a newly confident opposition; he basked in the applause of an audience that included September 11th families as he vowed to put Al Qaeda leaders on trial at Guantánamo, where, he announced, they had just been moved from the C.I.A.'s secret overseas prisons; he reassured the world that the United States doesn't torture prisoners in these "black sites," while essentially reserving the right to continue to do so. He simultaneously played the good cop and the bad cop, the principled advocate of the Geneva conventions and the hard-boiled defender of "an alternative set of procedures" (which went unspecified). And he forced the Democrats into an agonizingly familiar position: the preëlection defensive crouch. A bill that the White House sent to Congress last week presented members with the choice of voting for the President's military tribunals, which would allow the use of evidence gained by coercion and deprive defendants of the right to hear all the evidence against them, or trying to rebut election-eve commercials that accuse them of wanting to see the likes of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed go unpunished.

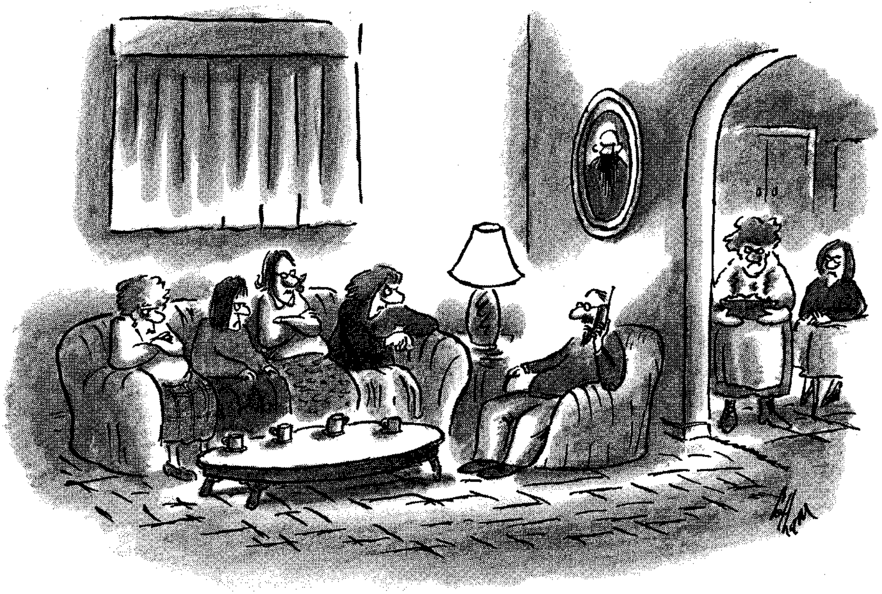
It was the kind of performance—part inspirational, part fear-purveying, part bullying—that used to be this President's signature. Its deftness and its timing were reminiscent of his successful effort in the weeks before the last midterm elections, in 2002, to force his opponents into rushed and politically difficult votes on the Homeland Security bill and the Iraq-war resolution. In Washington last week, the political class shook its head in admiration—*you can't count him out yet!*



Within hours of the speech, the Republican leadership in Congress, which had been making unhappy noises at the smell of its own potential demise, reverted to its coöperative role and promised to bring the White House bill up for a vote in a matter of weeks, or even days. Senators John McCain, John Warner, and Lindsey Graham, whose alternative proposal would ban the tribunals from admitting coerced or secret evidence, will either stand up to their party leaders or find a way to declare technical victory while caving in. After five years, justice for Al Qaeda is suddenly so urgent that it has to be guaranteed before, say, November 7th. The Democrats hit back, but you could hear the quaver—*not again!*

Whether or not the public mood shifts to the President in time for the midterms, the recovery of his political skills will be of no help in the long struggle against radical Islam. In fact, it will be harmful. Everything about the speech that sparkled with tactical cleverness in terms of domestic politics contributed to an ongoing strategic disaster around the world. "The United States does not torture," the President said. "I have not authorized it and I will not authorize it." This was a lie, and most of the world knows it. The lie, and the reality that the phrase "an alternative set of procedures" is meant to conceal—simulated drowning, sleep and sensory deprivation, induced hypothermia, beatings, and other forms of torture that are responsible for some of the dozens of detainee deaths

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL



"Sorry, guys, my wives won't let me leave the compound."

considered to be homicides—have done more to embolden America's enemies and estrange its friends than anything Osama bin Laden might say or do.

The speech was full of distortions: for example, the President's statement that the prisoners at Guantánamo are hard-core terrorists and that "we have in place a rigorous process to insure those held at Guantánamo Bay belong at Guantánamo" (innocent men have languished there for years); and his implication that the C.I.A.'s harsh interrogation methods led to the capture of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (he was arrested on the basis of a tip that the C.I.A. received from an Al Qaeda walk-in willing to help the American side). Abu Zubaydah, the terrorist subject of most of the President's assertions, was described by some C.I.A. sources as a mentally ill Al Qaeda factotum. The President asked the public to accept on faith his assertions that terrorist plots were foiled and other terrorists seized thanks to the harsh methods. Perhaps, in some of these cases, Bush is telling the truth, but there's no compelling reason to think so.

By now, the President's relentless exploitation of September 11th has made even non-partisan Americans skeptical of his claims. In the Administration's current public-relations blitz, Bush has invoked Hitler, Lenin, and wars for civilization, while Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld compared Iraq-war critics to Nazi appeasers circa 1938. The purpose of the rhetoric is not to persuade—if the Administration believed in argument on the merits, Bush would have to defend torture—but to make reasoned debate impossible. With one half of the country whipped into a state of fear and the other half sunk in cynicism, Americans can scarcely think or talk clearly about whether, five years on, we need a profound change in strategy.

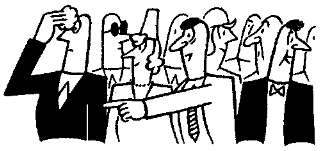
At almost exactly the same hour last week that the President was speaking in the East Room, Lieutenant General John (Jeff) Kimmons, the Army's deputy chief of staff for intelligence, was briefing reporters at the Pentagon on the military's new field manual for "human intelligence collector operations." The manual spells out which interrogation techniques will be forbidden. "Interrogators may not force a detainee to be naked, perform sexual acts, or pose in a sexual manner," General Kimmons said, in exactly the specific language that the President refuses to use. "They cannot beat or electrically shock or burn them or inflict other forms of physical pain, any form of physical pain. They may not use water boarding." When the General was asked whether he thought it was a mistake *not to* classify the list of permitted techniques, he showed that some members of the government and the military have learned from the mistakes of the past few years: the need for transparency, for working with allies, he said, is greater than the need for secrecy. And when a reporter asked whether some of the now forbidden forms of torture might have been useful in gaining information, General Kimmons directly contradicted what his Commander-in-Chief was saying at the White House:

> No good intelligence is going to come from abusive practices. I think history tells us that. I think the empirical evidence of the last five years, hard years, tells us that. And, moreover, any piece of intelligence which is obtained under duress, through the use of abusive techniques, would be of questionable credibility, and additionally it would do more harm than good when it inevitably became known that abusive practices were used. And we can't afford to go there. Some of our most significant successes on the battlefield have been—in fact, I would say all of them, almost categorically all of them, have accrued from expert interrogators using mixtures of authorized humane interrogation practices, in clever ways that you would hope Americans would use them, to push the envelope within the bookends of legal, moral, and ethical, now as further refined by this field manual. So we don't need abusive practices in there.

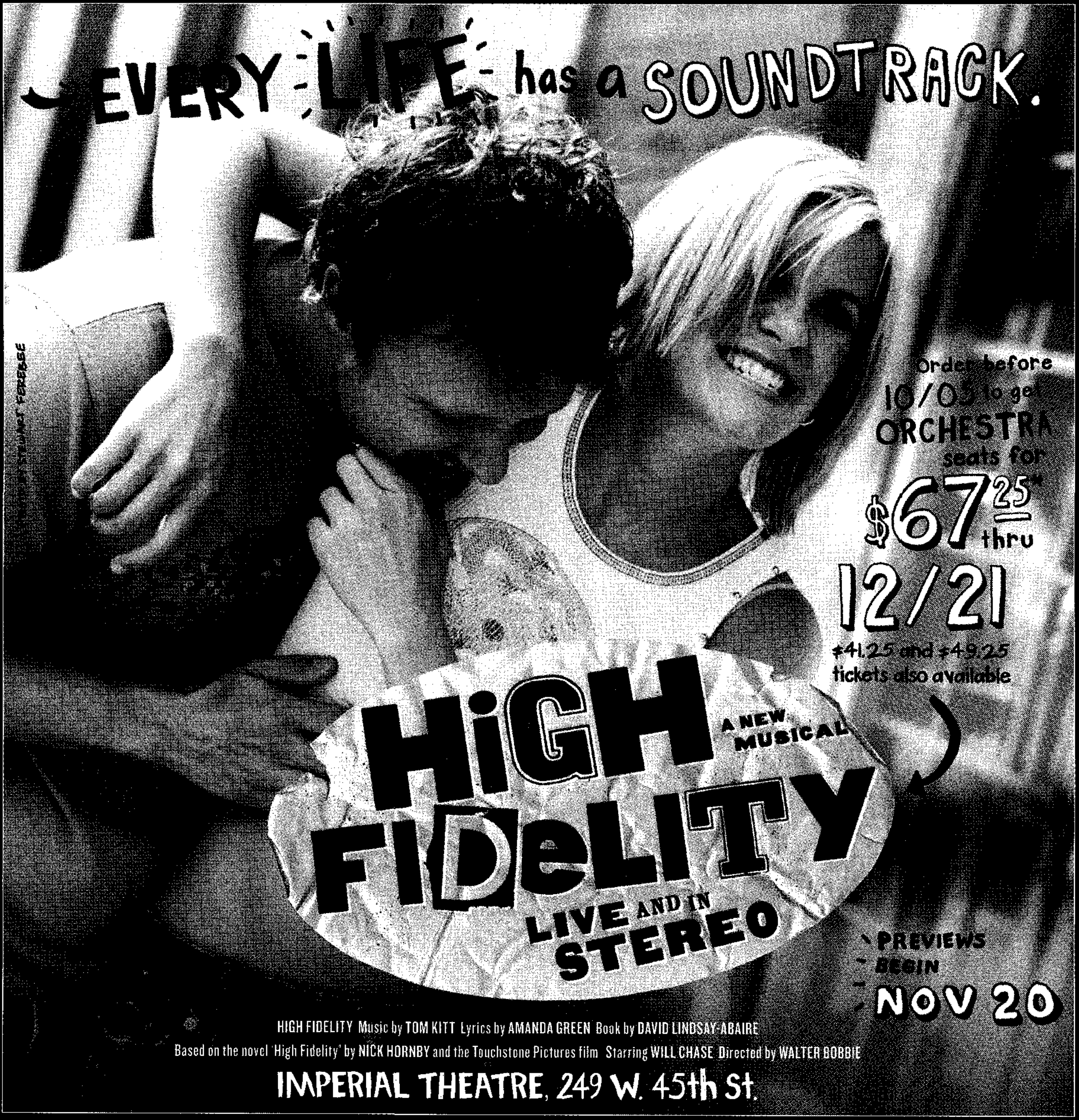
Last week, in the guise of calling for fair trials, the President demanded that Congress give him the power to go on torturing detainees in secret prisons and use the evidence obtained against them. And last week the Army honorably closed the holes in moral conduct that the President, his counsel, the Vice-President, the Justice Department, and the Secretary of Defense pried open shortly after September 11th. It did so not only to remove the stain on its reputation and to protect its soldiers but because it cares more about the war than about the next election.

—*George Packer*

LOOK OUT BELOW DEPT.
FOOD FIGHT



Consider the doughnut: workingman's food, light to the touch but heavy in the gut, beloved by Homer Simpson, cops, and Canadians. No snack sneers so winningly at pretension. Mayor Bloomberg, at both of his City Hall inau-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gurals, demonstrated his populism by dispensing doughnuts (first glazed, then plain). This Labor Day, for his efforts, he was served a doughnut in return by his constituency. The doughnut was chocolate, frosted, and stale. (Furthermore, according to the Mayor's spokesman, it was half-eaten.) It came from above—nine floors? ten floors? One couldn't be sure—and landed, according to *Newsday*, with a "popping sound," not far from the Mayor's lectern.

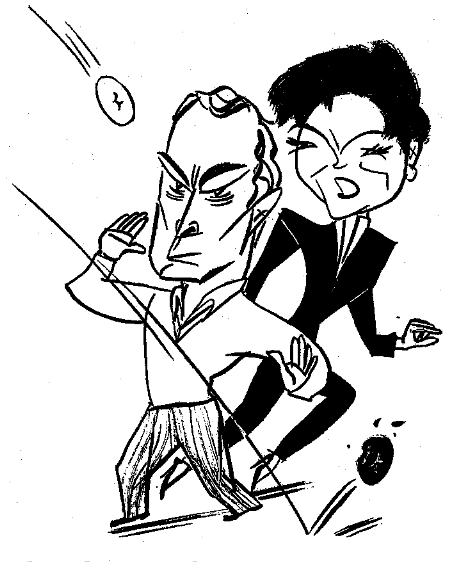
At the time of the doughnut drop, Bloomberg was wearing a hot-pink sweater and matching socks—an easy target—and facing an apartment tower at the Wyckoff Gardens housing projects, in Brooklyn, to announce the installation of high-tech security cameras there. The identity of the assailant is not known, nor is the intended meaning of the projectile, which may explain Bloomberg's uninspired response: "Just another reason why we need cameras." By contrast, when the former British Prime Minister Harold Wilson was pelted with rotten eggs, at Cambridge in the nineteen-sixties, he parried successfully, replying that even students "can afford eggs to throw under Labour."

The Mayor's girlfriend, Diana Taylor, ran for cover at the sight of the doughnut. If physical harm had been intended, the doughnut, however stale, represents a peculiar choice, especially when compared with weaponized foodstuffs of recent renown, like a twenty-pound turkey (one was lobbed, to nearly murderous effect, onto a Long Island road in 2004); hot coffee (pitched, by a New York state senator, in the face of an aide); and cream pies (tossed at both Bill Gates and Ann Coulter). Sports lore lends some symbolic context: in a famous incident in 1988 (termed DoughnutGate by the press), the pro hockey coach Jim Schoenfeld called the referee Don Koharski a "fat pig," and twice exhorted him to "have another doughnut." The referees' union boycotted the next game, and scabs were called in. Officer Koharski became the name of a character—a cop, at a doughnut shop—in the movie "Wayne's World": a dubious honor, even for a ref.

There is no shortage of potential political metaphors. The doughnut's shape is that of a zero, and, during the 2004 Presidential campaign, Al Sharpton criticized President Bush for delivering what he called a doughnut speech: "a lot of sugar and syrup on the outside, and nothing but a hole in the middle." Residents of public-housing developments might well be familiar with empty promises.

A visit to Wyckoff Gardens, last Wednesday, revealed that the doughnut was merely the latest of many pantry items sent aloft. According to residents, the list includes ice, cans, bottles, diapers, batteries, eggs, condoms, and water balloons. "If they were truly aiming at him, they'd have got him," one woman said, while sitting with several others on a row of benches that faced the offending tower. They were still marvelling at all the cosmetic improvements to the grounds—plastering, pruning, painting—that had quickly been made in the days before the Mayor's photo op.

The consensus was that the doughnut attack had not been political. "Throw a rat—*that'd* send a message," a man said. But one woman, who identified herself as a chef, did have a grievance: with the Mayor's enthusiasm for gentrification. Along with the new wave of Manhattan transplants to the neighborhood had come restaurants and markets on Atlantic Avenue that were not to her taste. "Not everybody likes their food cold and raw," she said, referring to sushi. "Not everybody likes their food unseasoned. Not everybody particularly likes organic food. I mean, I've done organic food. It's not tasty." She was under the impression that the Bloomberg doughnut had been adorned with sprinkles.



Doughnut attack

"Yeah, I've made doughnuts, but I don't throw doughnuts," she added. "You won't find my ingredients coming out the window. My butter and my eggs cost way too much to be wasting them on him." (Chefs, perhaps, cannot afford eggs to throw under a Republican.)

"And mine would not be stale," she went on. "If I threw my peanut-butter cookies out the window, they'd be catching them, not ducking."

—*Ben McGrath*

ENDLESS SUMMER
STOKED

Sachia, a reedy fifteen-year-old from the Lower East Side, is a man of many passions: Nike Air Jordans, limited-edition baseball hats, snowboarding. Until recently, learning to surf was decidedly not among them ("I like hot water, not cold," he said), but to hold his place in the extreme-sports mentoring program, Stoked, which, come January, will host the same snowboarding excursions he loved earlier this year, he consented to try the wetter sport of wave riding.

Stoked, which has programs in New York and Los Angeles, pairs mentees selected from inner-city schools with young professionals, all of whom are board-sport novices. The eleven pairs in this year's New York surf clinic, the program's second, took five trips out to Rockaway Beach, in Queens, to "achieve the impossible," as the program's Web site puts it, "by standing on water."

The group departed from West Twenty-third Street on a recent Saturday morning. Unable to make the third outing, Sachia's mentor, Dave Brennan—indisposed by one of the seven weddings he will attend this year—had arranged for three female volunteers to stand in for him. One of them, Sasha Shlyamberg, sought Sachia out on the sidewalk. (A photographer, Shlyamberg also bartends. "I tell the kids I waitress, though," she said.) "Hey, we're Team Sachia!" she told him. Sachia rolled his eyes and walked away.

On the subway, a mentor in his late twenties assumed a surfer's stance as the train jerked from side to side. "Practicing balance," he said. Sunscreen was applied and passed around. A survey was handed out to the teen-agers, with such questions as "During the last 30 days, how many times did you carry a gun?" and "During your life, how many times have you used marijuana?"

"Are you trying to get us arrested?" Sachia said.

Two subway transfers and a short walk later, the group had reached its destination: a five-hundred-yard stretch of beach that is the only spot in New York City designated for surfers alone. Close to eighty surfers bobbed on the four-foot swells.

A male volunteer said, "The mentees don't need to stretch, but we do."

First, though, some public service: a beach cleanup. Ten-odd members of a local environmental group were waiting on the beach when the Stoked crew arrived. They passed out latex gloves and garbage bags, and the pairs dispersed. Sachia followed several paces behind Shlyamberg and the two other women, a towel over his head. The haul included candy wrappers, straws, a pack of D batteries, a box of incense, a lime, several used condoms, a pack of cigarettes, and a silver spoon.

Finally, then, to the water! The mentees waded out first, each accompanied by an instructor, who helped acquaint them with their foam-top beginner boards and coached them on the finer points of "paddling hard and popping up." Sixteen-year-old Zaidy caught a wave and sprang to her feet. (Later, she said, "I've got natural talent, I guess," adding that two of her aunts, in Puerto Rico, are surfers.) Other mentees rode in on their boards, some standing, many crouching, one lying face down with her eyes closed and her arms pressed against her sides.

Sachia was the last one in the water. ("We had a hard time getting him to take his sneakers off the second week," a volunteer said.) His instructor, Joel Banslaben, explained that everyone's relationship with the water is different. "I want to stay in the white water," Sachia told him, referring to the area where he was able to stand. "That's fine," Banslaben said.

Following a morning of pointers, Sachia attempted to catch some waves close to shore. After a particularly triumphant ride, in which he coasted in with one arm raised, his pinkie and pointer finger extended to the sky, he undid his ankle leash and walked over to Shlyamberg, who was talking with another mentor by the water's edge.

"Did you see me pop up?" he said.

"Yeah! That was great!" Both women congratulated him, then resumed their conversation. "So I set my brother up with a friend of mine and he really likes her," Shlyamberg said.

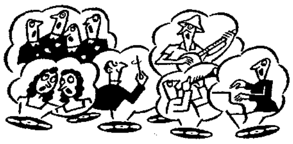
"What? That's disgusting," Sachia said. "That means you're desperate and you can't get somebody on your own."

"That's not true," Shlyamberg said. Each woman gave him an example of a successful fix-up that she knew about.

Sachia looked out at the water. "I want to go back in," he said.

—*Lauren MacIntyre*

FRANCO-AMERICAN DEPT.
MRS. B.H.L.



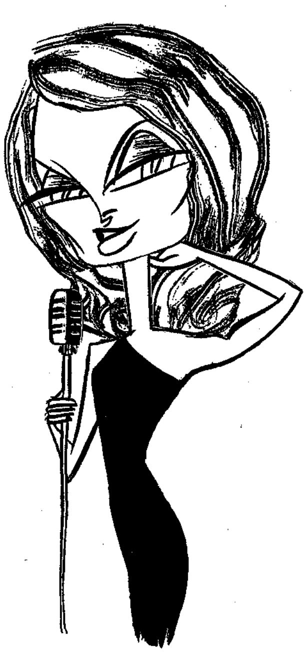
Arielle Dombasle, a movie actress who is half of France's most famous couple—her husband is Bernard-Henri Lévy, the dashing philosopher-journalist and timber-fortune heir—has hitherto been best known in this country for her appearance, in 1984, in the steamy miniseries "Lace," in which she played one of the bitches who were not Phoebe Cates's mother. She is about to present another facet of her artistic personality, that of chanteuse: next week she will be appearing at the Supper Club, performing hits from the forties and fifties that she delivers in a breathy Gallic soprano. The effect is as if Marilyn Monroe had attempted to channel Edith Piaf; and Dombasle, who is forty-eight and has long, honey-blond hair, a pronounced pout, and what has plausibly been described as the smallest waist in Paris, has been performing to capacity crowds all over France.

The other night, Dombasle was rehearsing in a recording studio in the West Twenties with the New York Big Band, which will be accompanying her at the Supper Club. She wore a clingy, fine-gauge cashmere sweater and low-rise jeans, her hair was pulled back into a fur scrunchie, and a pair of Chanel sunglasses sat atop her head. "Look how pretty they are! And so old!" she said, casting an approving eye over the mostly grizzled heads of the assembled musicians, some of whom could have played the songs on Dombasle's last album, "Amor Amor"—"Rhum and Coca-Cola," "Bésame Mucho"—when they were fresh, new compositions. Joe Battaglia, the band's elderly leader, referred to her as "young lady."

"You photograph well," he said, looking at a picture, propped on her music stand, of a sultry Dombasle embracing her late, beloved cat, Sloogy.

"Well, with the right lighting everyone does," Dombasle said.

The era from which her repertoire is drawn was an *époque bénie* in which Franco-American relations were at their warmest, Dombasle had explained earlier in the week over tea at the Carlyle Hotel. She was born in Connecticut to French parents and brought up in Mexico, where her grandfather, an intimate of de Gaulle, was ambassador. She admits to a fondness for the United States currently uncommon among her French peers. "There is so much misunderstanding," she said with a sigh. "When



Arielle Dombasle

they pour wine in the streets here, it is a pity. And in France, too, they have so many wrong ideas in the head."

She shares her conviction of the virtues of America with her husband, whose most recent book, "American Vertigo: Traveling America in the Footsteps of Tocqueville," was a spectacularly panned national *tour d'horizon*, and his first American best-seller. Dombasle and B.H.L., as he is known in France, have been married for thirteen years, having conducted a clandestine affair for the previous seven while both were married to other people. She claims to have fallen in love with B.H.L. in 1979, solely on the strength of a brooding photograph on the cover of "La Barbarie à Visage Humain," the book that made him famous in France, because, she thought, he looked like Christ. The couple has homes in Paris and in Marrakech, where they bought a palace whose previous owners include Alain Delon and J. Paul Getty, Jr. "Of course, with money you travel first class, so it is more comfortable, but that is the only thing money brings," Dombasle said. Her Latin songs are in part a tribute to the Mexican maids who reared her. "I was miserable in my extraordinary castle," she said, "and I was happy with my poor maids in the barrio."

She moved to Paris at eighteen to study classical Baroque opera but was "stolen by the movies"; her breakthrough role was in Eric Rohmer's "Pauline at the Beach." These days, she prefers singing to acting. "I've been singing in some remote places, for instance in Bordeaux, where I don't know a soul," she said. "And still people come in order to get a moment of communion." During a break in the rehearsal, Dombasle had an opportunity for a moment of communion, or at least of communication, with the musicians, who found it charming to mingle with a French movie star even if they had not seen any of her movies, and among whom there were several who remembered when Franco-American relations had been very warm indeed. "I only learned to say two things in French," said John Scorzello, a trumpet player who had been stationed in France after the war. "*Combien*? and *Bonjour, mon petit poulet*."

—*Rebecca Mead*

POSTCARD FROM BRAZIL
FAMILY TREE

The head of the only genuine royal monarchy in North or South America is the fifty-two-year-old Brazilian prince, Dom João Henrique Maria Gabriel Gonzaga de Orleans e Bragança. He makes his living by developing tourist resorts and also by selling hearts of palm from his eight-hundred-acre palm-tree plantation; publishes books—eight so far—of his photographs of Brazil; heads environmental campaigns; and keeps his twenty-five hundred acres of rain forest untouched. He has longish blond-gray hair, green eyes, and a light beard and mustache. He surfs, hikes, and bicycles in Rio de Janeiro, where he lives with his architect wife, Stella—who is, at the moment, designing interiors for a new Club Med in Rio—and their two children, nineteen-year-old Prince João Phillipe Maria Francisco Pedro de Alcantara Gonzaga de Orleans e Bragança, who is an economics student in Rio, and seventeen-year-old Maria Cristina de Orleans e Bragança, who is a fledgling writer. The Prince spends half his time in his seventeenth-century hacienda in the coastal town of Parati.

"I am here thanks to Napoleon," he said the other day at his house, where he was hosting a lunch for attendees at the recent Parati International Literary Festival. "My great-great-great-great-grandfather King João VI of Portugal fled with his family from Napoleon's invasion in 1807 and came to Brazil. The King's son, Dom Pedro I, was the first emperor of Brazil; that's him and his wife, Empress Leopoldina of Habsburg," he went on, indicating a solemn couple depicted in a large oil painting on the wall. "The Emperor gave independence to Brazil in 1822. I am his great-great-great-grandson. That other portrait on the wall—the man with the bushy black beard—is Emperor Pedro II. He was emperor for forty-nine years. He was admired for being very simple. He didn't want to imitate his cousins' courts in Europe. He felt that a king must be close to his people, so he travelled all over, getting to know the country people."

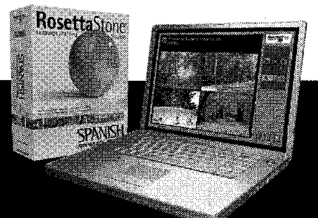
The Prince's cell phone rang in his pants pocket. He opened it and spoke quickly and quietly to the caller in Portuguese. Then he flipped the phone closed. "It was my cousin Maria da Gloria, Duchess of Segorbe; she lives in Spain and likes to talk," he said. "I have so many cousins, royals all over the world; we are all related." He nodded at some heavy silver spurs and other bits of silver displayed on a table. "They belonged to my great-grandfather, the Conde d'Eu, on the royal French side," he said. "Emperor Pedro II died in exile in a hotel room in Paris. My father, João Maria de Orleans Bragança e Dobrzensky de Dobrezenics, was born in exile in Paris and raised in France, but he was educated to serve his country, Brazil. The family moved back here in 1929, and my father served as a major in the Air Force. There is a beautiful story of my mother and father. She was an Egyptian princess, Fatma Chirine. My father met her in Cairo when, as a pilot, he was inaugurating a flight between Rio and Cairo. King Farouk bitterly forbade her to marry my father, so they ran away," he said, giving a long laugh. He continued, "My sister, Princess Melekper Tousson, lives in Paris and works in the Quai d'Orsay. She called me today on the cell. She wants to know what your British journalist here at the festival, Christopher Hitchens, is saying about Lebanon."

Brazil, the Prince said, is sixteen times the size of France. He said that he liked to follow his family's tradition of travelling all over Brazil, photographing his people and the landscape. "This year, I drove three thousand kilometres in ten days, and photographed a young puma, which had been found abandoned as a baby; it was raised by a girl who works with our national park in a northern state, until it was six months old.

"When I was eighteen, my friends used to go to night clubs. I used to go to the beautiful jungle. I hate the jet set. They want to know who has the best car, the best clothes, the most money. They are decadent, crazy."

A few nights later, the Prince, his Nikon FM in hand, attended the literary festival and listened to Fernando Gabeira, a Brazilian journalist, and Hitchens argue about the Middle East. Then the Prince jostled elbows with fellow-photographers to get a good shot.

—*Lillian Ross*



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ANNALS OF ECONOMICS

MIND GAMES

What neuroeconomics tells us about money and the brain.

BY JOHN CASSIDY

Like many people who have accumulated some savings, I invest in the stock market. Most of my retirement money is invested in mutual funds, but now and again I also buy individual stocks. My holdings include the oil company Royal Dutch Shell, the drug company GlaxoSmithKline, and the phone company British Telecommunication. I like to think that I picked these stocks because I can discern value where others can't, but my record hardly backs this up. I invested in BT in 2001, shortly after the Nasdaq crashed, when the stock had already fallen substantially, only to watch it slide another fifty per cent. I should have sold out, but I held on, hoping for a rebound. Five years later, the stock is trading well below the price I paid for it, and I still own it.

I sometimes wonder what goes on in my head when I make stupid investment decisions. A few weeks ago, I had a chance to find out, when I took part in an experiment at New York University's Center for Brain Imaging, in a building off Washington Square Park. In the lobby, I met Peter Sokol-Hessner, a twenty-four-year-old graduate student, who escorted me to a control room full of computers. Sokol-Hessner is completing a doctorate in psychology, but he is currently working on a research project in the emerging field of neuroeconomics, which uses state-of-the-art imaging technology to explore the neural bases of economic decision-making.

Sokol-Hessner is particularly interested in "loss aversion," which is what I was suffering from when I refused to sell my BT stock. During the past decade or so, economists have devised a series of experiments to demonstrate just how much we dislike losing money. If you present people with an even chance of winning a hundred and fifty dollars or losing a hundred dollars, most refuse the gamble, even though it is to their advantage to accept it: if you multiply the odds of winning—fifty per cent—times a hundred and fifty dollars, minus the odds of losing—also fifty per cent—times a hundred dollars, you end up with a gain of twenty-five dollars. If you accepted this bet ten times in a row, you could expect to gain two hundred and fifty dollars. But, when people are presented with it once, a prospective return of a hundred and fifty dollars isn't enough to compensate them for a possible loss of a hundred dollars. In fact, most people won't accept the gamble unless the winning stake is raised to two hundred dollars.

Why are we so averse to losses, even at the expense of gains? At the Center for Brain Imaging, I removed my belt and shoes and entered a room containing a big metal box, which measured about six feet by six feet by six feet, with a slim gurney protruding from one side. It was a magnetic-resonance-imaging machine, identical to those hospitals use to scan bodies for lesions and tumors. "As blood pumps through the brain, the oxygen it contains causes small changes in the magnetic field," Sokol-Hessner explained. "The scanner can pick up on that and tell us where the blood is flowing. We get a picture of which parts of the brain are being used."

I put on earplugs and lay back on the gurney. Sokol-Hessner and two lab assistants placed some foam around my ears and lowered a plastic grille over my face. In one of my hands they placed a metal console with two buttons on it. I felt my head and shoulders sliding into a long, cylindrical hole about a foot and a half wide. "Take a few deep breaths," Sokol-Hessner said. There was a crashing noise—the sound of the magnet warming up. Struggling to fend off claustrophobia, I closed my eyes and counted to a hundred while the scanner took a picture. "How are you doing?" asked Sokol-Hessner, who had retreated to the control room. "Fine," I lied.

My task was to consider a series of investment options that were presented on a small illuminated screen over my head. In each case, one of the options would be a fifty-fifty bet and the other would be a sure thing. The first scenario appeared on the screen: a possible gain of four dollars and a possible loss of two dollars versus a sure thing of zero, meaning that I wouldn't win or lose anything. I had three seconds to make my selection. Two dollars didn't seem like a lot to lose, so I pressed a button on the console to accept the bet. Somewhere in the next room, a random number generator was deciding whether I had won or lost. Then this message flashed on the screen: "You won $4.00."

Sokol-Hessner's thesis advisers are Elizabeth Phelps, a professor of psychology and neural science at N.Y.U., and Colin Camerer, an economist at Caltech who helped found neuroeconomics. This spring, I visited Camerer at his office in Pasadena, California. He is a stocky man of forty-six, with a large, bald head and blue eyes. His office was cluttered with textbooks and academic journals, and on one wall there was a whiteboard covered with equations. It looked like every other economist's office I've visited, except that on Camerer's desk there was a plastic model of the human brain.

While we were speaking, Camerer picked up the model and gave me a quick tour, starting at the front, with the prefrontal cortex, a structure that helps us perform complicated mental tasks, such as logical reasoning and planning. Then he pointed to the parietal cortex and the temporal lobes, regions that are also involved in deliberative decision-making. All these areas are much larger in humans than in other animals; scientists think that they were the last parts of the brain to evolve.

The model was made of layers of interlocking pieces. Camerer removed a piece from the top layer, exposing the so-called limbic areas beneath, including the insular cortex and the striatum. These structures date to the earliest period of human evolution, and neuroscientists believe that they help us process emotions. Camerer was particularly eager to show me the amygdala, a pair of almond-shaped structures that also play a role in the processing of emotions. "They are in here somewhere," he said, removing more pieces from the model.

Camerer was a child prodigy. He grew up in Baltimore and entered college at Johns Hopkins at the age of fourteen, majoring in mathematics. He spent a lot of time at a local racetrack, betting on horses, a hobby that got him interested in risk-taking and decision-making. In 1981, when he was twenty-one, he obtained a Ph.D. in economics at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business. Camerer also found inspiration outside his field.

In 1979, two Israeli psychologists, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, published a paper in the economics journal *Econometrica*, describing the concept of loss aversion. At the time, few economists and psychologists talked to one another. In the nineteenth century, their fields had been considered closely related branches of the "moral sciences." But psychology evolved into an empirical discipline, grounded in close observation of human behavior, while economics became increasingly theoretical—in some ways it resembled a branch of mathematics. Many economists regarded psychology with suspicion, but their preference for abstract models of human behavior came at a cost.

In order to depict economic decisions mathematically, economists needed to assume that human behavior is both rational and predictable. They imagined a representative human, *Homo economicus*, endowed with consistent preferences, stable moods, and an enviable ability to make only rational decisions. This sleight of hand yielded some theories that had genuine predictive value, but economists were obliged to exclude from their analyses many phenomena that didn't fit the rational-actor framework, such as stock-market bubbles, drug addiction, and compulsive shopping. Economists continue to study *Homo economicus*, but many recognize his limitations. Over the past twenty-five years, using methods and insights borrowed from psychology, they have devised a new approach to studying decision-making: behavioral economics.

One of Camerer's mentors, Richard Thaler, was among the first economists to cite Kahneman and Tversky's work; beginning in 1987, he published a series

Economists have devised experiments to show just how much we hate losing money.

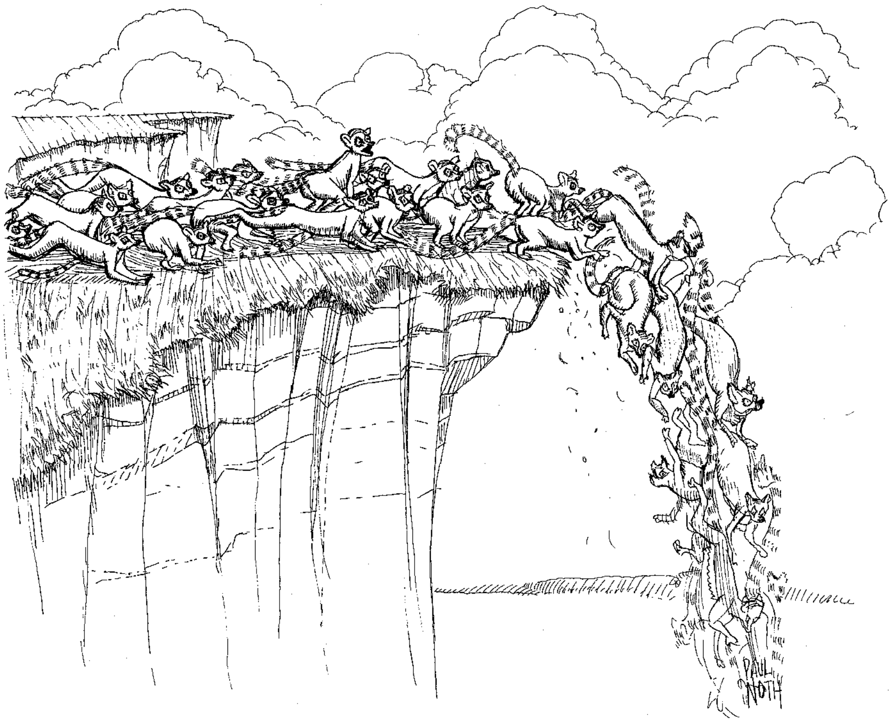
SEYMOUR CHWAST

of influential articles describing various types of apparently irrational behavior, including loss aversion.

Acknowledging that people don't always behave rationally was an important, if obvious, first step. Explaining *why* they don't has proved much harder, and recently Camerer and other behavioral economists have turned to neuroscience for help. By the mid-nineteen-nineties, neuroscientists, using MRI machines and other advanced imaging techniques, had developed a basic understanding of the roles played by different parts of the brain in the performance of particular tasks, such as recognizing visual patterns, doing mental computations, and reacting to threats. In the mid-nineties, Antonio Damasio, a neurologist at the University of Iowa, and Joseph LeDoux, a neuroscientist at N.Y.U., each published a book for lay readers describing how the brain processes emotions. "We were reading the neuroscience, and it just seemed obvious that there were applications to economics, both in terms of ideas and methods," said George Loewenstein, an economist and psychologist at Carnegie Mellon who read Damasio's and LeDoux's books. "The idea that you can look inside the brain and see what is happening is just so intensely exciting."

In 1997, Loewenstein and Camerer hosted a two-day conference in Pittsburgh, at which a group of neuroscientists and psychologists gave presentations to about twenty economists, some of whom were inspired to do imaging studies of their own. In the past few years, dozens of papers on neuroeconomics have been published, and the field has attracted some of the most talented young economists, including David Laibson, a forty-year-old Harvard professor who is an expert in consumer behavior. "Natural science has moved ahead by studying progressively smaller units," Laibson told me. "Physicists started out studying the stars, then they looked at objects, molecules, atoms, subatomic particles, and so on. My sense is that economics is going to follow the same path. Forty years ago, it was mainly about large-scale phenomena, like inflation and unemployment. More recently, there has been a lot of focus on individual decision-making. I think the time has now come to go beyond the individual and look at the inputs to individual decision-making. That is what we do in neuroeconomics."

When people make investments, they weigh the possible outcomes of their decisions and select a portfolio of stocks and bonds that offers the highest possible return at an acceptable level of risk. That is what mainstream economics says, anyway. In fact, people often have only a vague idea of the risks they face. Consider my investment in BT. Back in 2002, there was no way that I could have predicted how much profit the company would make in 2006, let alone in 2010 or 2020. I bought the stock, nonetheless, convinced that it could only increase in value.



"Wait a minute. We're lemurs! Lemurs!"

As imaging technology gets more sophisticated and easier to use, it may become possible to monitor investors' brains while they trade stocks at their offices. For now, however, economists are restricted to laboratory experiments, in which they pay volunteers to play simple games designed to imitate situations that people experience in daily life. In one study, Camerer and several colleagues performed brain scans on a group of volunteers while they placed bets on whether the next card drawn from a deck would be red or black. In an initial set of trials, the players were told how many red cards and black cards were in the deck, so that they could calculate the probability of the next card's being a certain color. Then a second set of trials was held, in which the participants were told only the total number of cards in the deck.

The first scenario corresponds to the theoretical ideal: investors facing a set of known risks. The second setup was more like the real world: the players knew something about what might happen, but not very much. As the researchers expected, the players' brains reacted to the two scenarios differently. With less information to go on, the players exhibited substantially more activity in the amygdala and in the orbitofrontal cortex, which is believed to modulate activity in the amygdala. "The brain doesn't like ambiguous situations," Camerer said to me. "When it can't figure out what is happening, the amygdala transmits fear to the orbitofrontal cortex."

The results of the experiment suggested that when people are confronted with ambiguity their emotions can overpower their reasoning, leading them to reject risky propositions. This raises the intriguing possibility that people who are less fearful than others might make better investors, which is precisely what George Loewenstein and four other researchers found when they carried out a series of experiments with a group of patients who had suffered brain damage. Each of the patients had a lesion in one of three regions of the brain that are central to the processing of emotions: the amygdala, the orbitofrontal cortex, or the right insular cortex. The researchers presented the patients with a series of fifty-fifty gambles, in which they stood to win a dollar-fifty or lose a dollar. This is the type of gamble that people often reject, owing to loss aversion, but the patients with lesions accepted the bets more than eighty per cent of the time, and they ended up making significantly more money than a control group made up of people who had no brain damage. "Clearly, having frontal damage undermines the over-all quality of decision-making," Loewenstein, Camerer, and Drazen Prelec, a psychologist at M.I.T.'s Sloan School of Management, wrote in the March, 2005, issue of the *Journal of Economic Literature*. "But there are situations in which frontal damage can result in superior decisions."

Not long ago, I drove to Princeton University to speak to Jonathan Cohen, a fifty-year-old neuroscientist who is the director of Princeton's Center for the Study of Brain, Mind, and Behavior. Nine years earlier, while he was teaching at Carnegie Mellon, Cohen attended the conference that Camerer and Loewenstein organized. "I had never taken any economics courses; I had no idea what they did," he recalled. "I thought it was all about setting interest rates."

Since then, Cohen has collaborated with economists on several imaging studies. "The key idea in neuroeconomics is that there are multiple systems within the brain," Cohen said. "Most of the time, these systems coöperate in decision-making, but under some circumstances they compete with one another."

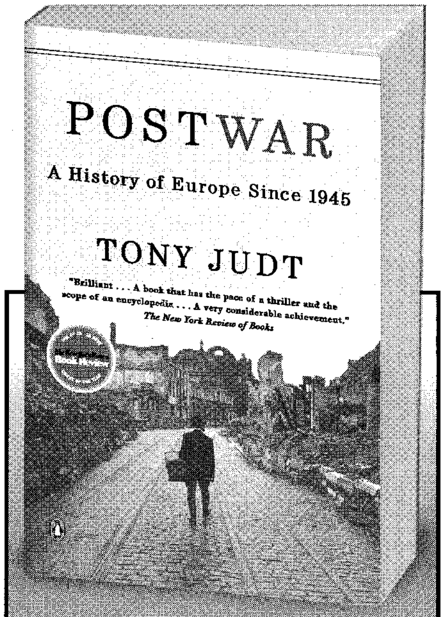
A good way to illustrate Cohen's point is to imagine that you and a stranger are sitting on a park bench, when an economist approaches and offers both of you ten dollars. He asks the stranger to suggest how the ten dollars should be divided, and he gives you the right to approve or reject the division. If you accept the stranger's proposal, the money will be divided between you accordingly; if you refuse it, neither of you gets anything.

How would you react to this situation, which economists refer to as an "ultimatum game," because one player effectively gives the other an ultimatum? Game theorists say that you should accept any positive offer you receive, even one as low as a dollar, or you will end up with nothing. But most people reject offers of less than three dollars, and some turn down anything less than five dollars.

Cohen and several colleagues organized a series of ultimatum games in which half the players—the respondents—were put in MRI machines. At the beginning of a round, each respondent was shown a photograph of another player, who would make the respondent an offer. The offer then appeared on a screen inside the MRI machine, and the respondent had twelve seconds in which to accept or reject it. The results were the same as in other, similar experiments—low offers were usually vetoed—but the respondents' brain scans were revealing.

When respondents received stingy offers—two dollars for them, say, and eight dollars for the other player—they exhibited substantially more activity in the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, an area associated with reasoning, and in the bilateral anterior insula, part of the limbic region that is active when people are angry or in distress. The more activity there was in the limbic structure, the more likely the person was to reject the offer. To the researchers, it looked as though the two regions of the brain might be competing to decide what to do, with the prefrontal cortex wanting to accept the offer and the insula wanting to reject it. "These findings suggest that when participants reject an unfair offer, it is not the result of a deliberative thought process," Cohen wrote in a recent article. "Rather, it appears to be the product of a strong (seemingly negative) emotional response."

Several explanations have been proposed for people's visceral reaction to unfair offers. Maybe human beings have an intrinsic preference for fairness, and we get angry when that preference is violated—so angry that we punish the other player even at a cost to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ourselves. Or perhaps people reject low offers because they don't want to appear weak. "We evolved in small communities, where there was a lot of repeated interaction with the same people," Cohen said. "In such an environment, it makes sense to build up a reputation for toughness, because people will treat you better the next time they see you."

Unfortunately, some of the emotional responses that we developed millennia ago no longer serve us well. As Cohen put it, "Does it make sense to play tough with a person you meet on a street in L.A.? No. For one thing, you will probably never see that person again. For another, he may pull out a gun and shoot you." Obviously, we can't alter our brain structures, but it may be possible to influence decision-making by tinkering with brain chemistry. Last year, a group of economists led by Ernst Fehr, of the University of Zurich, demonstrated how this might be done, in an experiment involving what economists call "the trust game."

Trust plays a key role in many economic transactions, from buying a secondhand car to choosing a college. In the simplest version of the trust game, one player gives some money to another player, who invests it on his behalf and then decides how much to return to him and how much to keep. The more the first player invests, the more he stands to gain, but the more he has to trust the second player. If the players trust each other, both will do well. If they don't, neither will end up with much money.

Fehr and his collaborators divided student volunteers into two groups. The members of one group were each given six puffs of the nasal spray Syntocinon, which contains oxytocin, a hormone that the brain produces during breastfeeding, sexual intercourse, and other intimate types of social bonding. The members of the other group were given a placebo spray.

Scientists believe that oxytocin is connected to stress reduction, enhanced sociability, and, possibly, falling in love. The researchers hypothesized that oxytocin would make people more trusting, and their results appear to support this claim. Of the twenty-nine students who were given oxytocin, thirteen invested the maximum money allowed, compared with just six out of twenty-nine in the control group. "That's a pretty remarkable finding," Camerer told me. "If you asked most economists how they would produce more trust in a game, they would say change the payoffs or get the participants to play the game repeatedly: those are the standard tools. If you said, 'Try spraying oxytocin in the nostrils,' they would say, 'I don't know what you're talking about.' You're tricking the brain, and it seems to work."

Economics has always been concerned with social policy. Adam Smith published "The Wealth of Nations," in 1776, to counter what he viewed as the dangerous spread of mercantilism; John Maynard Keynes wrote "The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money" (1936) in part to provide intellectual support for increased government spending during recessions; Milton Friedman's "Capitalism and Freedom," which appeared in 1962, was a free-market manifesto. Today, most economists agree that, left alone, people will act in their own best interest, and that the market will coördinate their actions to produce outcomes beneficial to all.

Neuroeconomics potentially challenges both parts of this argument. If emotional responses often trump reason, there can be no presumption that people act in their own best interest. And if markets reflect the decisions that people make when their limbic structures are particularly active, there is little reason to suppose that market outcomes can't be improved upon.

Consider saving for retirement. Surveys show that up to half of all families end their working lives with almost no financial assets, other than their entitlement to Social Security benefits. Saving money is difficult, because it involves giving up things that we value now—a new car, a vacation, fancy dinners—in order to secure our welfare in the future. All too often, the desire for immediate gratification prevails. "We humans are very committed to our long-term goals, such as eating healthy food and saving for retirement, and yet, in the moment, temptations arise that often trip up our long-term plans," David Laibson, the Harvard economist, said. "I was planning to give up smoking, but I couldn't resist another cigarette. I was planning to be faithful to my wife, but I found myself in an adulterous relationship. I was planning to save for retirement, but I spent all my earnings. Understanding this tendency stands at the heart of a lot of big policy debates."

Laibson has collaborated with Loewenstein, Cohen, and Samuel McClure, another Princeton psychologist, to examine what happens in people's brains when they are forced to choose between immediate and delayed rewards. For a study the four researchers published in *Science*, in 2004, they used an MRI machine to scan a group of student volunteers who were asked to choose between receiving a fifteen-dollar Amazon.com gift voucher today and receiving a twenty-dollar Amazon.com gift voucher in two weeks or a month.

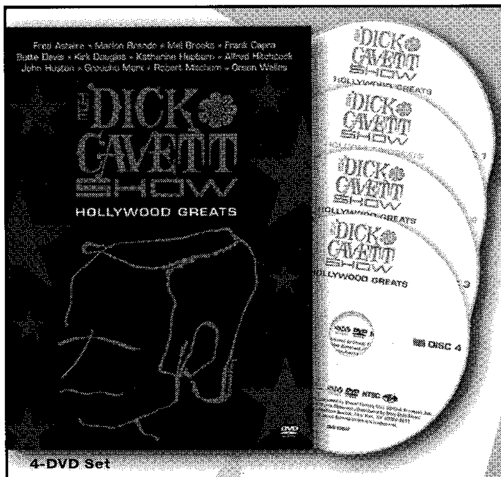
The scans showed that both gift options triggered activity in the lateral prefrontal cortex, but that the immediate option also caused disproportionate activity in the limbic areas. Moreover, the greater the activity in the limbic areas the more likely the students were to choose the voucher that was immediately available and less valuable.

The results provide further evidence that reason and emotion often compete inside the brain, and it also helps explain a number of puzzling phenomena, such as the popularity of Christmas savings accounts, which people contribute to throughout the year. "Why would anybody put money into a savings account that offers zero interest and imposes a penalty if you withdraw cash early?" Cohen said. "It simply doesn't make sense in terms of a traditional, rational economic model. The reason is that there is this limbic system that produces a strong drive. When it sees something it likes, it wants it now. So you need some type of pre-commitment device to make people save."

Laibson and Brigitte Madrian, an economist at the Wharton School, have studied one such "pre-commitment device" for 401(k) plans, which deduct part of an employee's earnings each month and invest them in stocks and bonds. Because the plans are often optional, many people fail to join them, even when their employers offer to match a portion of their contributions. Laibson and his colleagues have called for people to be automatically included in the plans unless they choose to opt out. At companies that have adopted such a policy, enrollment rates have increased sharply.

Reforming 401(k) plans is an example of "asymmetric paternalism," a new political philosophy based on the idea of saving people from the vagaries of their limbic regions. Warning labels on tobacco and potentially harmful foods are similarly intended to keep subcortical structures in check. Neuroeconomists have suggested additional policies, including warning buyers of lottery tickets that their chances of winning are practically nonexistent and imposing mandatory "cooling off" periods before people make big-ticket purchases, such as cars and boats. "Asymmetric paternalism helps those whose rationality is bounded from making a costly mistake and harms more rational folks very little," Camerer, Loewenstein, and three colleagues wrote in a 2003 issue of the *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*. "Such policies should appeal to everyone across the political spectrum."

Some neuroeconomic "findings" aren't exactly discoveries, of course. In the fourth century B.C., Plato described reason as a charioteer attempting to steer the twin horses of passion and spirit. More recently, Freud wrote about the contest between the ego and the id. "What is new," Jonathan Cohen wrote in the fall, 2005, issue of the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, "is that researchers now have the tools to begin to identify and characterize these systems at the level of their physical implementation in the human brain. Neuroscience gives detailed access to the mechanisms that underlie behavior and thus may allow scientists to answer questions that cannot be answered eas-



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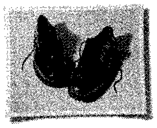

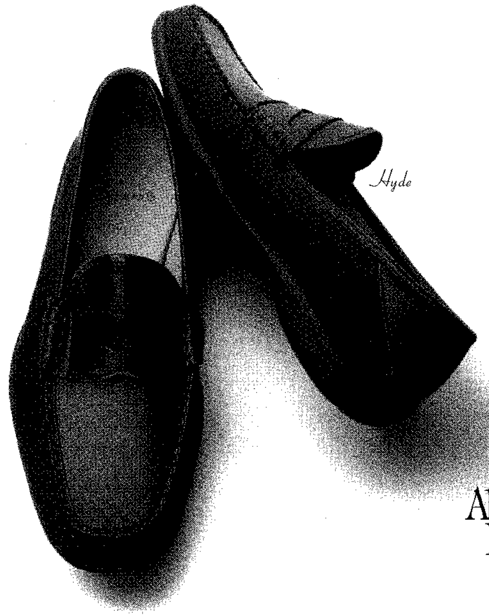

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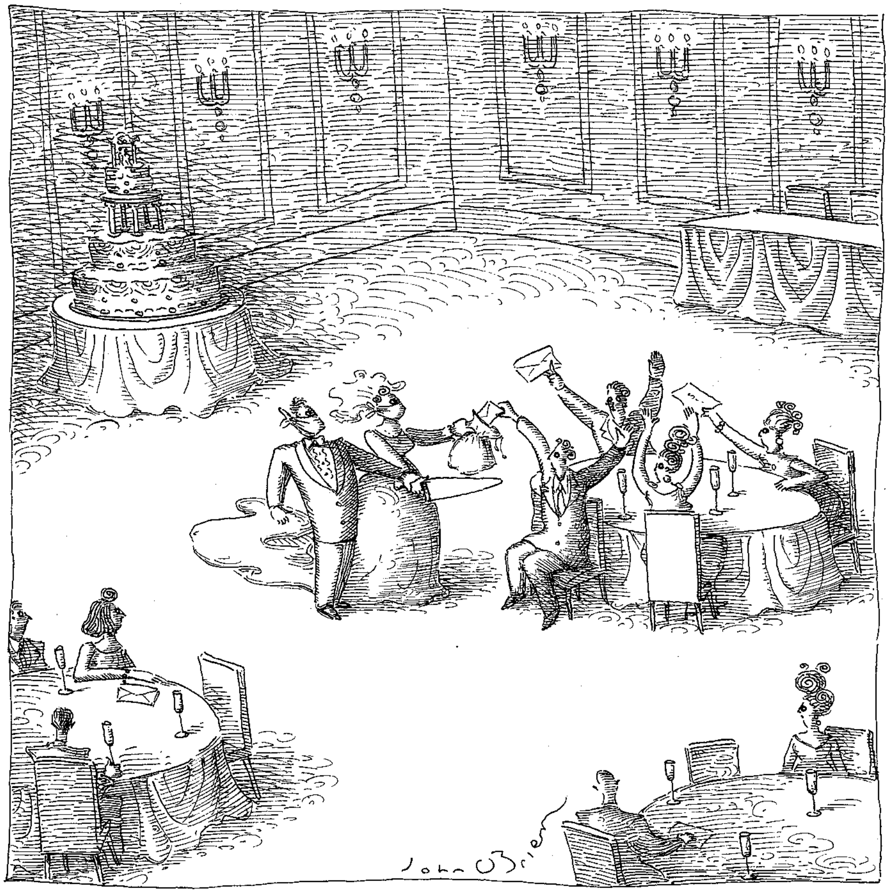


ily, or at all, by observing behavior alone."

Many traditional economists are unimpressed by this argument. In a recent paper, "The Case for Mindless Economics," Faruk Gul and Wolfgang Pesendorfer, two Princeton economists, wrote, "Neuroscience evidence cannot refute economic models because the latter make no assumptions and draw no conclusions about the physiology of the brain." Gul and Pesendorfer have a point: neuroeconomics doesn't tell us whether the neo-Keynesian or the neoclassical model of inflation is correct. But it can provide indirect evidence to reinforce certain theories and discredit others. About ten years ago, David Laibson published a paper on "hyperbolic discounting," which suggested that people treat immediate rewards differently from the way they treat delayed rewards, preferring the former in a manner that simple rational-choice models can't explain. Now the results of the Amazon voucher experiment have provided a possible explanation for the behavior that Laibson identified: immediate and delayed rewards stimulate different parts of the brain. "The practical implications of the experiment come from obtaining a better understanding of the human taste for instant gratification," Laibson said. "If we can understand that, we will be in a much better position to design policies that mitigate what can be self-defeating behavior."

The biggest challenge facing neuroeconomics comes not from its opponents in the economics profession but from its supposed allies in neuroscience. Many neuroscientists now consider MRI data to be uninformative. Neural activity occurs in milliseconds, on a scale of perhaps 0.1 millimetres. A typical MRI machine, which measures neural firing indirectly, by tracking blood flow, takes a picture every couple of seconds and isn't able to detect anything less than three millimetres long. Because of these limitations, neuroscientists prefer to track the firing of single neurons by inserting tiny electrodes into the brain. Unfortunately, this is an invasive procedure, and its experimental use has generally been restricted to laboratory animals.

There is also a more fundamental objection to neuroeconomics and the Platonic view of decision-making. "There is no evidence that hidden inside the brain are two fully independent systems, one rational and one irrational," Paul W. Glimcher, a neuroscientist who is the director of N.Y.U.'s Center for Neuroeconomics, and two of his colleagues, Michael C. Dorris and Hannah M. Bayer, wrote in a recent paper. "There is, for example, no evidence that there is an emotional system, per se, and a rational system, per se, for decision making at the neurobiological level."

In place of the reason-versus-passion model, Glimcher and his colleagues have adopted a view of decision-making that, paradoxically, bears a striking resemblance to orthodox economics. In one experiment, Glimcher and a colleague trained thirsty monkeys to direct their eyes to one of two illuminated targets, which earned them differing chances of getting juice rewards—a fifty-per-cent chance of getting a full cup of juice for looking right, say, versus a seventy-per-cent chance of getting half a cup of juice for looking left. The game was repeated many times, with the probabilities changing periodically.

The monkeys' task was to consume as much juice as possible, and they proved very adept at it. Before long, they were dividing their time between the illuminated targets in a way that roughly maximized their payoffs. When the odds favored looking right, they looked right; when the odds favored looking left, they looked left. Glimcher also used electrodes to track neural firing in part of the posterior parietal cortex, an area that is thought to organize signals transmitted by the retina. He discovered that the firing rate was closely related to the rewards the monkeys were likely to receive. "Specifically," he and his colleagues reported, "the firing rate of a neuron associated with a leftward movement was a linear function of the probability that the leftward movement would yield the juice reward."

Clearly, monkeys can't do probability sums. (Many humans struggle with them!) But Glimcher's experiment implies that their brains act as if they were solving a mathematical problem, which is what economists assume when they depict people as rational agents trying to maximize their well-being, or “utility.” “What seems to be emerging from these early studies is a remarkably economic view of the primate brain,” Glimcher and his colleagues wrote. “The final stages of decision-making seem to reflect something very much like a utility calculation.”

If Glimcher’s results could be demonstrated in human brains, they might undermine a lot of neuroeconomics, and many in the field tend to downplay his work. “Well, monkeys are very interesting, but they are not nearly as rich in their behavior as humans,” George Loewenstein said to me. “Humans have this very well-developed prefrontal cortex, which allows us to look ahead a number of stages, rather than just behaving in a reflexive fashion. Still, it’s wonderful that we have these controversies. Most of us are friends, and we debate these issues. I’ve learned a lot from talking to Paul.”

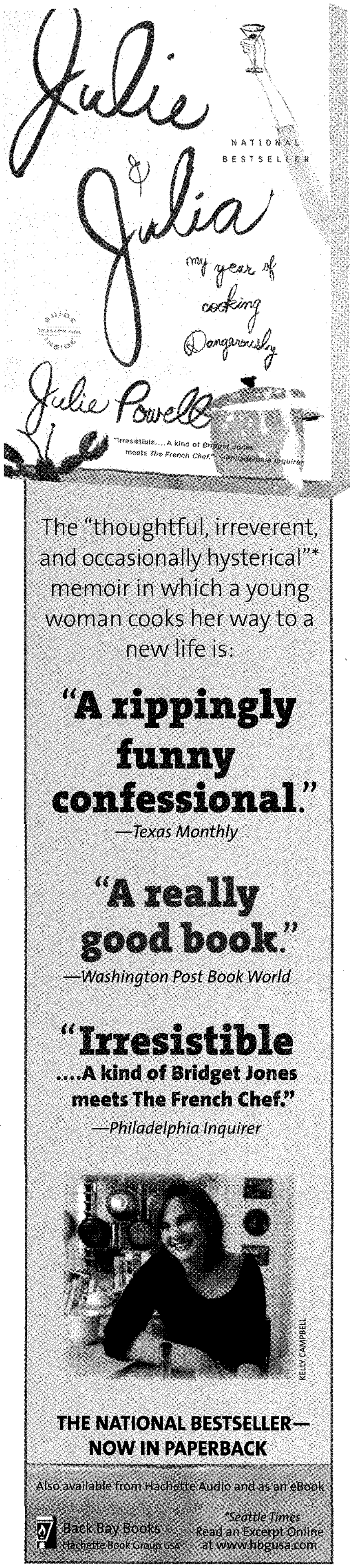
I was inside the MRI machine for nearly two hours, and I answered more than two hundred and fifty questions, which were organized into two blocks. Sokol-Hessner had instructed me to answer the first set as if each investment were the only one I would make. He told me to treat the second set of gambles as a group, as if I were constructing an investment portfolio. Later, he explained that he wanted to compare my answers to the two blocks of questions. Many people become less loss-averse when they are constructing a portfolio of investments, presumably because they believe that losses in one part of their portfolio will be made up for by gains in others. “Our research has shown that people can alter their own choice behavior in a systematic fashion,” Sokol-Hessner said. “They can make themselves less loss-averse. If loss aversion is mediated by the limbic structures, such as the amygdala, we would expect a big decrease in activity in those areas when you become less loss-averse.”

The goal of the imaging experiment was to test this hypothesis. I was only the second person to take part in the experiment, but Sokol-Hessner told me that I was an atypical case. Rather than altering my strategy, I answered all the questions in the same way. Whenever the risk-free option was worth more than about five dollars, I accepted it, thinking that I would have been foolish to turn down a sure thing. Occasionally, when the risk-free option was zero, or close to zero, I gambled on the risky option. I’m not sure why I acted in this way—it wasn’t strictly logical—but it made answering the questions easy, and it seemed to pay off: by the end of the experiment, I had won sixty-eight dollars.

My experience illustrated some of the drawbacks of brain scanning. After about an hour inside the machine, I was more concerned about getting out than I was about making a few dollars. (Sokol-Hessner said that I moved my head around so much that my brain scans were unusable.) “That’s the terrible thing about MRIs,” Sokol-Hessner conceded. “You are in a long tube, and you might well feel tired or claustrophobic. There’s definitely other stuff going on in there besides the experiment. We have to be very careful about how we interpret the evidence.”

Economists who have staked their careers on neuroeconomics are mindful of this advice. “It isn’t a wholesale rejection of the traditional methodology,” David Laibson said of his field. “It is just a recognition that decision-making is not always perfect. People try to do the best they can, but they sometimes make mistakes. The idea that a single mechanism maximizes welfare and always gets things right—that concept is on the rocks. But models that I call ‘cousins’ of the rational-actor model will survive.”

The modified theories to which Laibson referred assume that people have two warring sides: the first deliberative and forward-looking, the second impulsive and myopic. Under certain circumstances, the impulsive side prevails, and people succumb to things like drug addiction, overeating, and taking wild gambles in the stock market. For now, the new models await empirical verification, but neuroeconomists are convinced that they’re onto something. “We are not going to falsify all of traditional economics,” Colin Camerer said. “But we are going to point to a whole range of biological variables that traditionally have not been included in the analysis. In economics, that is a big change.” ♦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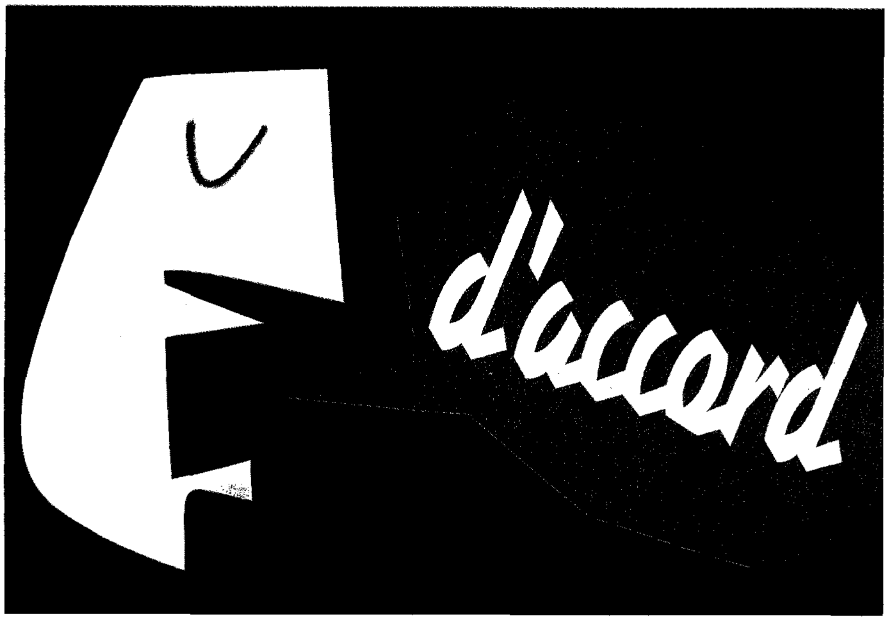
REFLECTIONS

IN THE WAITING ROOM

The advantages of speaking French.

BY DAVID SEDARIS

Six months after moving to Paris, I gave up on French school and decided to take the easy way out. All I ever said was "Could you repeat that?" And for what? I rarely understood things the second time around, and when I did it was usually something banal, the speaker wondering how I felt about toast, or telling me that the store would close in twenty minutes. All that work for something that didn't really matter, and so I began saying, "*D'accord*," which translates to "I am in agreement," and means, basically, "O.K." The word was a key to a magic door, and every time I said it I felt the thrill of possibility.

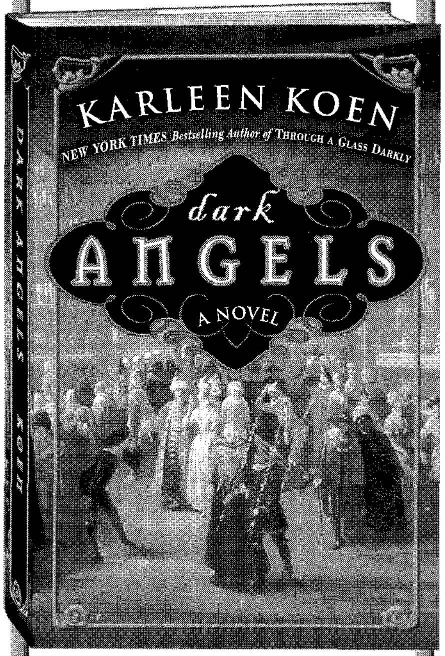


LAURIE ROSENWALD

"*D'accord*," I told the concierge, and the next thing I knew I was sewing the eye onto a stuffed animal belonging to her granddaughter. "*D'accord*," I said to the dentist, and she sent me to a periodontist, who took some X-rays and called me into his conference room for a little talk. "*D'accord*," I said, and a week later I returned to his office, where he sliced my gums from top to bottom and scraped great deposits of plaque from the roots of my teeth. If I'd had any idea that this was going to happen, I'd never have said *d'accord* to my French publisher, who'd scheduled me the following evening for a television appearance. It was a weekly cultural program, and very popular. I followed the pop star Robbie Williams, and, as the producer settled me into my chair, I ran my tongue over my stitches. It was like having a mouthful of spiders—spooky, but it gave me something to talk about on TV, and for that I was grateful.

I said *d'accord* to a waiter, and received a pig's nose standing erect on a bed of tender greens. I said it to a woman in a department store and walked away drenched in cologne. Every day was an adventure.

When I got a kidney stone, I took the Métro to a hospital, and said, "*D'accord*," to a cheerful red-headed nurse, who led me to a private room and hooked me up to a Demerol drip. That was undoubtedly the best that *d'accord* got me, and it was followed by the worst. After the stone had passed, I spoke to a doctor, who filled out an appointment card and told me to return the following Monday, when we would do whatever it was I'd just agreed



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to. "*D'accord*," I said, and then I supersized it with "*génial*," which means "great."

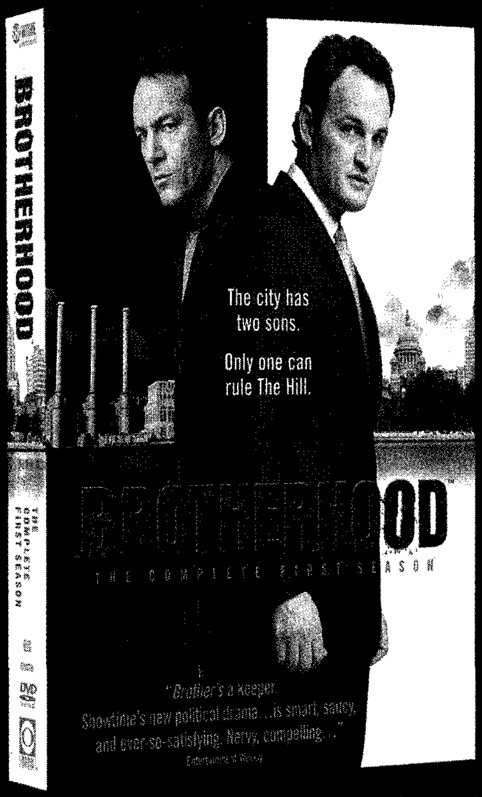
On the day of my appointment, I returned to the hospital, where I signed the register and was led by a slightly less cheerful nurse to a large dressing room. "Strip to your underwear," she told me, and I said, "*D'accord*." As the woman turned to leave, she said something else, and, looking back, I really should have asked her to repeat it, to draw a picture, if that's what it took, because once you take your pants off *d'accord* isn't really O.K. anymore.

There were three doors in the dressing room, and after removing my clothes I put my ear against each one, trying to determine which was the safest for someone in my condition. The first was loud, with lots of ringing telephones, so that was out. The second didn't sound much different, and so I chose the third, and entered a brightly painted waiting room furnished with plastic chairs and a glass-topped table stacked high with magazines. A potted plant stood in the corner, and beside it was a second door, which was open and led into a hallway.

I took a seat and had been there for a minute or so when a couple came in and filled two of the unoccupied chairs. The first thing I noticed was that they were fully dressed, and nicely, too—no sneakers or sweatsuits for them. The woman wore a nubby gray skirt that fell to her knees and matched the fabric of her husband's sports coat. Their black hair, which was obviously dyed, formed another match, but looked better on her than it did on him—less vain, I supposed.

"*Bonjour*," I said, and it occurred to me that possibly the nurse had mentioned something about a robe, perhaps the one that had been hanging in the dressing room. I wanted more than anything to go back and get it, but, if I did, the couple would see my mistake. They'd think I was stupid, so to prove them wrong I decided to remain where I was and pretend that everything was normal. *La la la*.

It's funny the things that run through your mind when you're sitting in your underpants in front of a pair of strangers. Suicide comes up, but, just as you embrace it as a viable option, you remember that you don't have the proper tools: no belt to wrap around your neck, no pen to drive through your nose or ear and up into your brain. I thought briefly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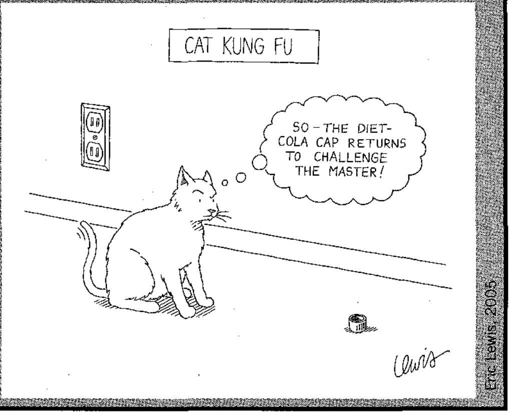
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of swallowing my watch, but there was no guarantee I'd choke on it. It's embarrassing, but, given the way I normally eat, it would probably go down fairly easily, strap and all. A clock might be a challenge, but a Timex the size of a fifty-cent piece, no problem.

The man with the dyed black hair pulled a pair of glasses from his jacket pocket, and as he unfolded them I recalled a summer evening in my parents' back yard. This was thirty-five years ago, a dinner for my sister Gretchen's tenth birthday. My father grilled steaks. My mother set the picnic table with insect-repelling candles, and just as we started to eat she caught me chewing a hunk of beef the size of a coin purse. Gorging always set her off, but on this occasion it bothered her more than usual.

"I hope you choke to death," she said.

I was twelve years old, and paused, thinking, Did I hear her correctly?

"That's right, piggy, suffocate."

In that moment, I hoped that I *would* choke to death. The knot of beef would lodge itself in my throat, and for the rest of her life my mother would feel haunted and responsible. Every time she passed a steak house, or browsed the meat counter of a grocery store, she would think of me and reflect upon what she had said—the words "hope" and "death" in the same sentence. But, of course, I hadn't choked. Instead, I had lived and grown to adulthood, so that I could sit in this waiting room dressed in nothing but my underpants. *La la la.*

It was around this time that two more people entered. The woman looked to be in her mid-fifties, and accompanied an elderly man who was, if anything, overdressed: a suit, a sweater, a scarf, and an overcoat, which he removed with great difficulty, every button a challenge. *Give it to me,* I thought. *Over here.* But he was deaf to my telepathy, and handed his coat to the woman, who folded it over the back of her chair. Our eyes met for a moment—hers widening as they moved from my face to my chest—and then she picked a magazine off the table and handed it to the elderly man, who I now took to be her father. She then selected a magazine of her own, and as she turned the pages I allowed myself to relax a little. She was just a woman reading a copy of *Paris Match,* and I was just the person sitting across from her. True, I had no clothes on, but maybe she wouldn't dwell on that, maybe none of these people would. The old man, the couple with their matching hair: "How was the hospital?" their friends might ask, and they'd answer, "Fine," or "Oh, you know, the same."

"Did you see anything fucked up?"

"No, not that I can think of."

It sometimes helps to remind myself that not everyone is like me. Not everyone writes things down in a notebook, and then transcribes them into a diary. Fewer still will take that diary, clean it up a bit, and read it in front of an audience: "March 14th. Paris. Went with Dad to the hospital, where we sat across from a man in his underpants. They were briefs, not boxers, a little on the gray side, the elastic slack from too many washings. I later said to Father, 'Other people have to use those chairs, too, you know,' and he agreed that it was unsanitary.

"Odd little guy, creepy. Hair on his shoulders. Big idiot smile plastered on his face, just sitting there, mumbling to himself."

How conceited I am to think I might be remembered, especially in a busy hospital where human misery is a matter of course. If any of these people did keep a diary, their day's entry would likely have to do with a diagnosis, some piece of news either inconvenient or life-altering: the liver's not a match, the cancer has spread to the spinal column. Compared with that, a man in his underpants is no more remarkable than a dust-covered plant, or the magazine-subscription card lying on the floor beside the table. Then, too, good news or bad, these people would eventually leave the hospital and return to the streets, where any number of things might wipe me from their memory.

Perhaps on their way home they'll see a dog with a wooden leg, which I saw myself one afternoon. It was a German shepherd, and his prosthesis looked as though it had been made from a billy club. The network of straps holding the leg in place was a real eyeopener, but stranger still was the noise it made against the floor of the subway car, a dull thud that managed to sound both plaintive and forceful at the same time. Then there was the dog's owner, who looked at his pet and then at me, with an expression reading, "That's O.K. I took care of it."

Or maybe they'll run into something comparatively small yet no less astonishing. I was walking to the bus stop one morning and came upon a well-dressed woman lying on the sidewalk in front of an office-supply store. A small crowd had formed, and just as I joined it a fire truck pulled up. In America, if someone dropped to the ground, you'd call an ambulance, but in France it's the firemen who do most of the rescuing. There were four of them, and, after checking to see that the woman was O.K., one of them returned to the truck and opened the door. I thought he was looking for an aluminum blanket, the type they use for people in shock, but instead he pulled out a goblet. Anywhere else it would have been a cup, made of paper or plastic, but this was glass, and had a stem. I guess they carry it around in the front seat, next to the axes or whatever.

The fireman filled the goblet with bottled water, and then he handed it to the woman, who was sitting up now and running her hand over her hair, the way one might when waking from a nap. It was the lead story in my diary that night, but, no matter how hard I fiddled with it, I felt something was missing. Had I mentioned that it was autumn? Did the leaves on the sidewalk contribute to my sense of utter delight, or was it just the goblet, and the dignity it bespoke: "Yes, you may be on the ground; yes, this drink may be your last—but let's do it right, shall we?"

Everyone has his own standards, but, in my opinion, a sight like that is at least fifty times better than what I was providing. A goblet will keep you going for years, while a man in his underpants is good for maybe two days, a week at the most. Unless, of course, *you* are the man in his underpants, in which case it will probably stay with you for the rest of your life—not on the tip of your mind, not handy like a phone number, but still within easy reach, like a mouthful of steak, or a dog with a wooden leg. How often you'll think of the cold plastic chair, and of the nurse's face as she passes the room and discovers you with your hands between your knees. Such surprise, such amusement as she proposes some new adventure, then stands there, waiting for your "*d'accord.*" ♦

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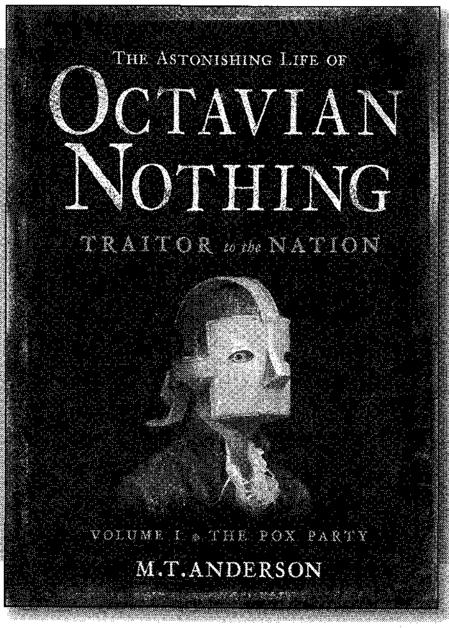

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PROFILES

THE WANDERER

Bill Clinton's quest to save the world, reclaim his legacy—and elect his wife.

BY DAVID REMNICK

On a clear spring afternoon in Berlin, Bill and Chelsea Clinton rode to the World Cup final in the front seats of a bus. The Olympic Stadium—a severe Greco-Roman construction with Fascist flourishes and corporate logos—was built for the 1936 Games and still looks very much as it did seventy years ago, when Jesse Owens outran the racial theories of his host. But the World Cup tournament had been a surpassingly apolitical event, and now, in the fields and parking lots surrounding the stadium, cheerful venders sold lager and wurst at non-rip-off prices. There were no drunks, no thugs, no skinhead invective. Although the Germans had been eliminated by the Italians in a brutal semifinal, the city was in a mood of lighthearted self-satisfaction. The souvenir stores sold German history as kitsch: one popular postcard was a picture of Erich Honecker over his declaration "*Die Mauer bleibt noch 100 Jahre*" ("The Wall will endure for a hundred years").

As the bus pulled up to the stadium, a few people stopped to greet the ex-President and his daughter, but most hustled to the gates in orderly streams. Clinton, though he may be less schooled in "the beautiful game" than in the fortunes of the Arkansas Razorbacks, said, "I'm totally psyched for this."

The Clintons took their seats in the "statesmen's section," at midfield. While Clinton's statesmanship has been strictly freelance for the past six years, he was not far from the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, and he spent time during the game, and during the breaks, chatting with old friends—the schmoozer *in excelsis*. He was in the midst of a long trip typical of his increasingly manic and global post-Presidency. He started out from his house in the New York suburb of Chappaqua, campaigned for a local Democrat in Indianapolis, gave a public interview at the Aspen Ideas Festival, gave a speech in Los Angeles, returned to Aspen, and then, flying on the private jet of one of his many wealthy friends, landed in Berlin. Immediately after the game, he was scheduled to fly to Cape Town, for the start of a seven-country tour of Africa, where he would look in on the H.I.V.-AIDS programs that the William J. Clinton Foundation, his base for good works, had established in the previous few years.

Upon arriving in Berlin, Clinton had felt the need for some improvised pregame affection, and so he directed the bus, which carried him and a travelling party of aides, donors, a doctor, Secret Service agents, and volunteer advance workers, to the Brandenburg Gate, where more than half a million ticketless enthusiasts had gathered to watch the match on a set of huge television screens. The bus pulled up behind a stage that had been erected under the gate. Clinton climbed down from the bus and took in the mass of people. "*Damn*, that's some crowd!" he said. A rock band performing onstage got the signal from the wings to wind up a song, and Clinton, white-haired, trim, and wearing the dark suit and radiant tie of high office, strode out to the microphone and began to wave. The crowd didn't immediately know who it was—*Is that…? What is he doing here?*—but as people began to recognize him on the big screens, with the familiar smile and the ingratiating squint, they started to cheer, louder and louder. It was impossible not to wonder what the reception would have been for George W. Bush—here or just about anywhere else in the world—and it is this implicit comparison that accounts for the remarkable popularity of Bill Clinton.

"I'm honored to be here, and thank you to Germany," he said, lolling in the warm bath of cheers.

Clinton didn't really have much more to say, and he knew that the crowd was not in the mood for a speech. It was enough to present himself and feel the love. He was beaming; his color rose to the high blush of a peach. And the memories! As he left the stage, he paused under the gate and pointed. "In 1994, Helmut Kohl and I stood on a stage here," Clinton told me over the roar. "That day, there were a hundred thousand people—but nothing like this. This is great. When I was President…"

The band started a strangely Teutonic version of "Bohemian Rhapsody"—*Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?*—drowning him out for a moment.

Clinton shouted louder, the better to provide a lesson in the history of the Brandenburg Gate: "You've got the French versus the Germans, the Franco-Prussian War of 1871, World War One, World War Two…"

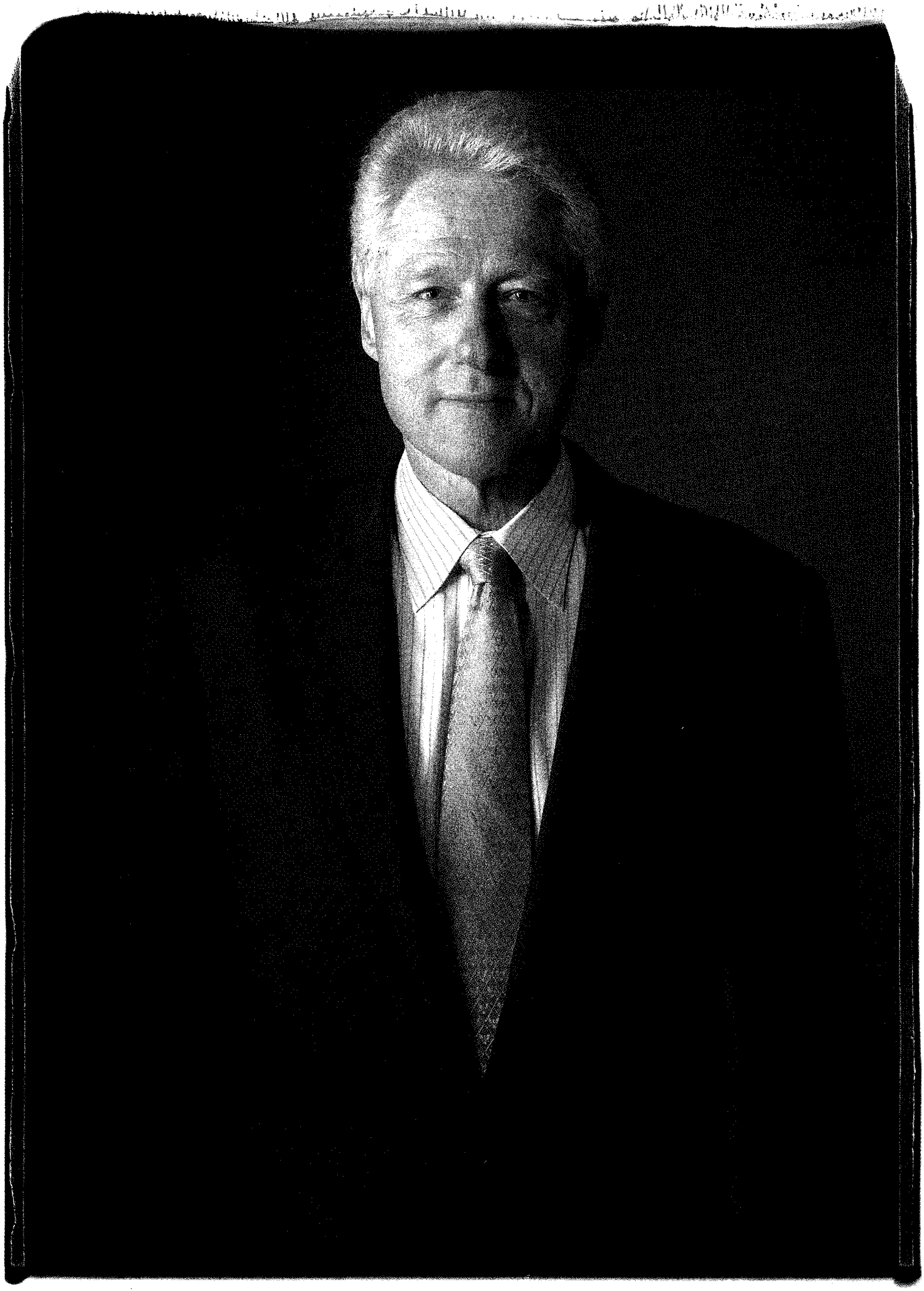
"What?"

"I said, these are the original gates, but they were restored!" he said, pointing to the yellow mortar. "They went about covering the bullet marks. They didn't want Germany to be defined just by violence. A hundred years from now, the restoration will blend in completely with the original gate…"

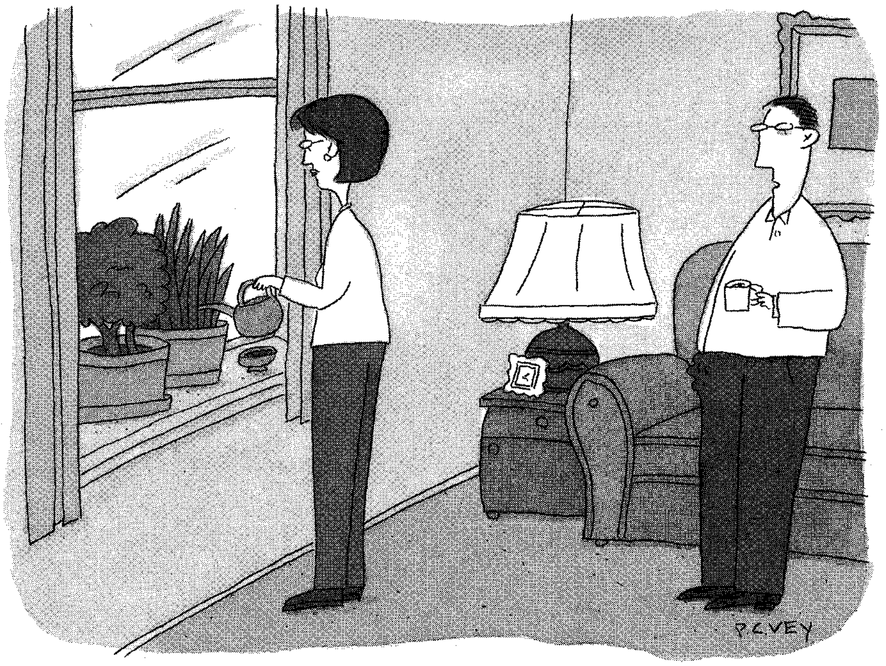
"*What?*"

The scene reminded him of a trip to Ghana he made in 1998, when seven hundred thousand people turned out on the streets of Accra to greet him. Chelsea, who was taking a few days off from her job (she is a consultant at McKinsey & Company in New York), stood off to the side, her hands clasped in front of her, watching her father work; she seemed patient, sweetly indulgent and knowing. She had waited for her father before.

"I was the first President to speak on the east side of the gate," Clinton went on. Then he shook some more hands and posed for pictures with a row of cheerleaders holding glittery pom-poms. Jay Carson, a diligent young Georgian who works as Clinton's communications



Clinton left office angry, exhausted, and broke: "I identify with people who get beat up." Photograph by Mary Ellen Mark.



"Do you think we'll ever regret having two plants and a bowl of pebbles instead of kids?"

director, started to interject the kind of polite "Ahem"s and "Thank you"s and nods that lesser politicians know to take as signals to wrap things up.

Clinton wraps things up in his own time. We made it to the game with a few minutes to spare. The battle between the Italian *azzurri* and the French *bleus* was an epic that ended in a crime, although the crucial moment was lost on nearly everyone in the stadium. It came (as we learned later) when the referee red-carded the venerable French midfielder Zinedine Zidane for head-butting a rival who, he claimed, had impugned the honor of his mother and his sister. As Zidane was banished from the Elysian fields, the jeering, unknowing crowd went almost completely over to the Gallic side; but, in the end, the Italians, emboldened by Zidane's absence, won the game—and the Cup—on penalty kicks.

About an hour later, Clinton was on the plane. He'd changed out of his suit and into a pair of black jeans and a lemon-yellow polo shirt.

"Pretty good game, huh?" he said, striding down the aisle of the plane, the inevitable Diet Coke clutched in his spookily large fist. (Hillary has written that she was immediately attracted to Clinton's hands—"His wrists are narrow and elegant and his long fingers deft, like those of a pianist or a surgeon. When we first met in law school, I loved just watching him turn the pages of a book.") One of Clinton's aides, an efficient young man named Justin Cooper, who carries the bags and makes sure that every detail is in order, interrupted and handed him a cell phone.

"Hillary!" Clinton shouted into the phone. He started walking to the rear of the plane. "Hillary, did you see that?"

When he came back, he was wearing a pair of gold-rimmed half-glasses and was chewing on an unlit cigar. Some on the plane were starting to get calls about Zidane.

"Hillary told me all about it," Clinton said. "I can't imagine what he must have been thinking."

Clinton was instantly forgiving of Zidane and wondered what would become of him. He recalled Gao Hong, the goalie for the Chinese women's team, who, in the 1999 World Cup final, gave up the decisive penalty kick to Brandi Chastain, of the American team. Gao had played brilliantly until that point, but, like Zidane, she had to return home and endure the consequences of her defeat.

"I identify with people who get beat up," Clinton said. "I remember that game like it was yesterday."

The plane was divided into three compartments. The Secret Service contingent and a few staffers were in front, press were in the middle, and Clinton and his aides in back. Through the open door, I could see him doing three or four things at once: telling old war stories, eating a yogurt parfait, drinking coffee, glancing at a stack of Xeroxed press clippings, playing cards. This was around one in the morning. The day had begun in Colorado; we were now somewhere over Algeria, headed for a refuelling stop in N'djamena, Chad. Since Clinton would eventually exhaust the card-playing endurance of his aides, the ever-industrious Carson was preparing a backup cadre: he was giving instruction in how to play Clinton's game. For decades, including the White House years, Clinton's game was hearts (or, when he lacked a posse, solitaire), but he dropped it when Steven Spielberg, a longtime Friend of Bill, taught him Oh Hell—a lesser cousin of contract bridge.

Nearly all Clinton's younger aides refer to their boss as "the President," but they also "do" him. They do the scratchy high-in-the-throat drawl, the run-on pronouncements studded with arcane facts and statistics ("And with every ten per cent of cell-phone penetration G.D.P. goes up point six per cent"), and the trademark exclamations ("Isn't that fascinating?"). Newcomers pick it up pretty quickly, and so, as half a dozen of us fumbled through our middle-of-the-night Oh Hell lesson, we were also cracking wise in the voice of the forty-second President of the United States. At around two-thirty, though, pillows and blankets appeared and lights were dimmed. Sleep beckoned. But, just as it did, a familiar voice beckoned from the doorway: "Hey! How you guys doin'?"

I saw some of Clinton's aides slouched in their seats in the rear of the plane, their eyes shut, their mouths agape like murder victims in a Weegee photograph. Clinton was carrying a marked-up copy of "The Party's Over: Oil, War, and the Fate of Industrial Societies," by Richard Heinberg, on how oil production led to economic modernity and how its depletion will shape the future.

"Interesting book, Mr. President?" someone asked.

Clinton sat down on the arm of the seat and eased his way into a near-soliloquy that lasted two hours. First, he talked about light bulbs—their history, their physical properties, their contribution to greenhouse gases, the latest developments in bulb technology. He talked about alternative fuels, ethanol research, the politics of ethanol, the value of tar sands, the near-inevitability of hundred-dollar-a-barrel oil. He talked about the relative virtues of hybrid vehicles and electric cars and whether Detroit had conspired to kill their development. He pronounced oil depletion an opportunity: "But we need to make fixing climate change as politically sexy as putting a man on the moon." And as the "conversation" veered into politics Clinton talked about one of his favorite recent books, a study, by Harold Holzer, of Lincoln's speech in 1860 at Cooper Union, which launched his campaign for the Republican nomination. It was Lincoln's "toughness" at Cooper Union that Clinton seemed to admire most, and which led him to a theme he kept returning to all week: the need for the Democratic Party to "lean into" Republican attacks. He made no secret of his feeling that the Democrats had lost winnable elections in 2000 and in 2004; Al Gore and John Kerry were "a couple of honorable men" but had been "tarred" as men of low character, and their campaigns failed to fight back effectively. Kerry, after the so-called Swift Boat veterans, with the tacit encouragement of the Republican campaign leadership, started smearing him, "should have challenged Bush and Cheney to a town-hall debate on their respective Vietnam records. Bush and Cheney were like me—they didn't go. Kerry was a genuine war hero!" In the gloom of the cabin, Clinton jabbed his finger to emphasize his point. The Kerry campaign was "like a deer caught in the headlights."

We were somewhere above the Sahara, but Clinton's mind was fixed on the condition of the Democratic Party in the Age of Bush and on the way the White House, even as Iraq verged on civil war, remained on the rhetorical and ideological offensive.

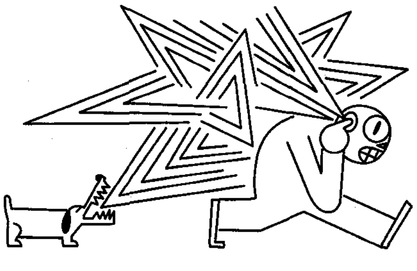
"I am sick of Karl Rove's bullshit," Clinton said. And yet there was a trace of admiration in the remark, a veteran pol's regard for the way his rival had packaged a radical brand of American conservatism as "compassionate conservatism" and kept on pushing it long after its sell-by date had passed.

"Nixon was a Communist compared to this crowd," Clinton said.

It was closing in on four in the morning. Weary heads were drooping. No matter. Without mentioning 2008 and the potential presence of his wife in the race for the Presidency, Clinton started talking about John McCain, the presumptive G.O.P. candidate, and he made sure to say how funny and decent he is, and how heroic he was in Vietnam, but soon he was pointing out McCain's "far-right" bona fides, his being "right there with Bush" on preëmptive war and "loads" of right-wing domestic policies. We had started out on light bulbs and, with hardly a question, landed within putting range of the Iowa caucus.

At around four-thirty, with Chad still in the distance, Jay Carson finally managed, with a series of coughs, stifled yawns, and expressive chin-lift gestures, to cue Clinton to call it a night. "Well, O.K., you guys," Clinton said. "Good talking to you. We're going to have a *great* time in Africa."

The post-Presidency as an institution and as a source of public interest is mainly a modern phenomenon. Perhaps the most important post-Presidential moment came when George Washington refused a third term and, in his farewell address, calmed any anxieties that the republic would be ruled by an enduring monarch. Thereafter, Presidents generally faded from view. "For a long time, you were either old and retired, died, or got killed," Sean Wilentz, a professor of American history at Princeton and a friend of the Clintons, told me. "Or you were some kind of rare exception."



John Quincy Adams and William Howard Taft were among those rare exceptions. After losing the Presidency to Andrew Jackson, in 1828, Adams was elected to a seat in the House of Representatives and, until his death, in 1848, represented Massachusetts as an anti-slavery Whig. Eight years after leaving the White House, in 1913, Taft was nominated by Warren Harding to succeed Edward Douglass White as Chief Justice of the United States; that made him the only politician in U.S. history to lead both the executive and judicial branches.

While Clinton was President, he had a range of living examples to consider: Richard Nixon, who, as the Sage of Saddle River, New Jersey, tried to rescue his reputation with a series of memoirs and foreign-policy pronouncements; Gerald Ford, who treated himself to a golf-and-early-supper retirement worthy of Bob Hope; George H.W. Bush, who combines occasional good works with Carlyle Group profiteering and speedy recreations. And then there is Jimmy Carter.

Carter was fifty-six when he left the White House, Clinton fifty-four. As Southern governors and centrist Democrats, the two men shadowed each other for twenty-five years but at times had a testy relationship. "I guess it's a Southern thing," Clinton once told me. But toward the end of his second term he invited Carter to the White House to talk about Carter's post-Presidential re-invention as an activist in global health, human rights, and freelance diplomacy. Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Carter are the only American Presidents who have won the Nobel Peace Prize; in Carter's case, it was largely the post-Presidency—his work as an election observer and his attempt to eliminate guinea-worm disease from Africa—that clinched it.

"I really was impressed by the way, after he took a few months off to deal with what had to be a terrible disappointment, he was back in harness," Clinton told me, referring to Carter's loss to Ronald Reagan, in 1980. Carter set up a foundation, yet he also made his living by writing nearly a book a year, including poetry, a historical novel, and a children's story. "I just love the fact that he never stopped learning, never stopped taking on challenges," Clinton said, "and I wanted to talk to him about it, because I thought his foundation was as close as anybody had come to kinda what I wanted to do."

Energetic, seemingly healthy, yet limited by the Twenty-second Amendment and the convention of rhetorical discretion, Clinton felt that he had two options: "You can sit there and feel sorry that you're not President anymore, or you can find some way to use what you know, and who you know, and what you know about how to do things, and go out there and do all the good you can. The one thing I made a very determined decision about, even before I got sick"—with heart disease, in 2004—"was that I would not leave the White House and spend the rest of my life wishing I were still President."

Clinton's final diplomatic push as President—an attempt, in 2000, to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—collapsed. A lasting treaty would have been his singular foreign-policy achievement, but in the public eye, at least, the failure had been a noble one. What sullied his reputation on the way out of the White House was a gross misjudgment in a far less exalted realm. In his last hours as President, Clinton pardoned the commodities broker Marc Rich, who was living as a fugitive from justice in Switzerland. Rich had been indicted for tax fraud and illegally dealing in Iranian oil.

Reflexively, the Republicans (who had indulged George H. W. Bush's pardon of six Iran-Contra figures in 1992) jumped on the mistake and equated it with the recklessness of the Monica Lewinsky affair. But not all the attacks were partisan. Jimmy Carter, for example, called the Rich pardon "disgraceful."

"I thought there would be controversy," John Podesta, Clinton's last White House chief of staff, said. "I didn't realize how much."

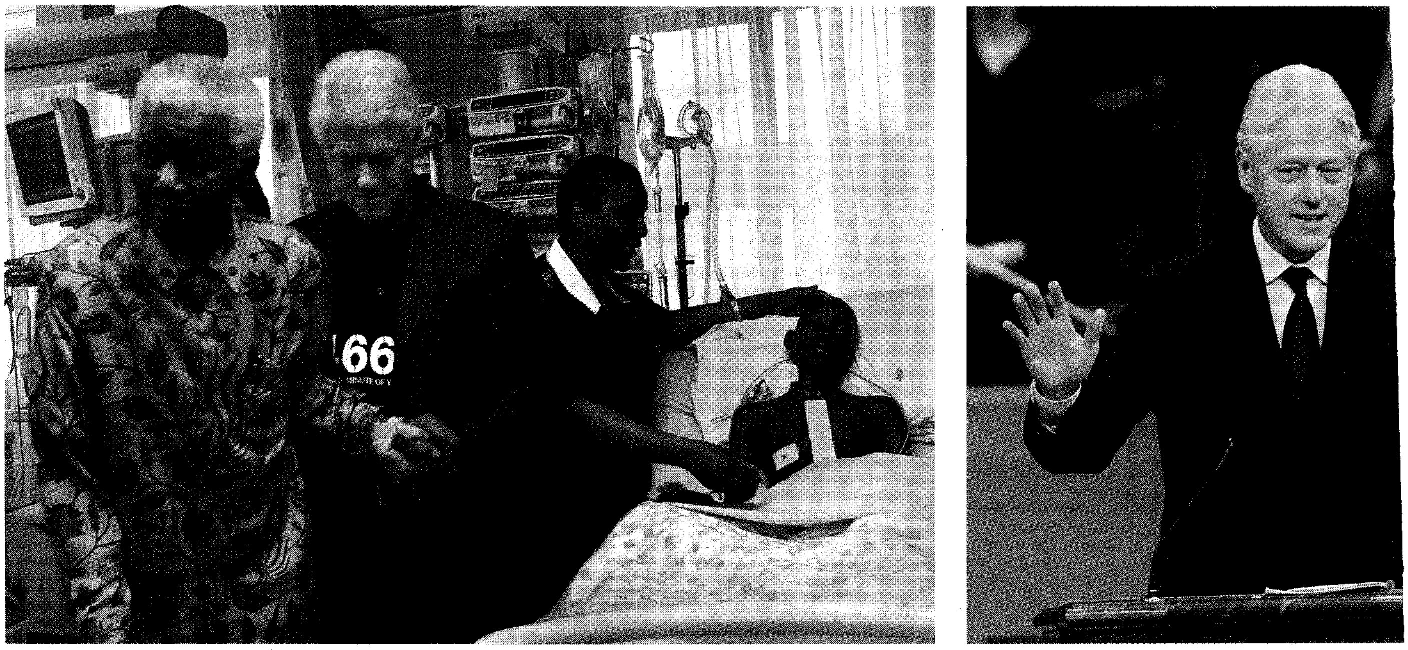
"Clinton should have had more brains," Rahm Emanuel, a former aide who is now a congressman from Illinois, told me. "He basically thought he had put all this stuff behind him and people were in the early stages of appreciating his Presidency, and not just small things but real accomplishments. It was worse than sloppy."

At the same time, the Republicans levelled a series of very dubious accusations. In the first days of the Bush Presidency, the papers were filled with ill-sourced reports that the Clinton people had "trashed" Air Force One and the White House and that the Clintons had illegally taken home gifts and furniture—all charges that faded upon inspection.

"I was livid," Clinton said of those stories. "I just couldn't believe it. I thought it was a low blow. And the other thing that was frustrating to me is—you know, my instinct was to go out and answer everything. Then I thought, Well, I shouldn't do this, because we just got a new President and I don't need to be taking up any more airtime right now. I just tried to let it go."

Clinton left the White House angry, exhausted, and broke. He also had to live with the fact that he had hurt Al Gore in the 2000 election, thereby jeopardizing his Presidential legacy—and, as it turned out, so much else. Not a few people made the calculation that if Monica Lewinsky hadn't been on pizza duty during the government shutdown of 1995 (and Clinton not so predisposed to share the snack) there might never have been a Bush Presidency at all, or a hyped case for war in Iraq, a botched occupation, a skyrocketing budget deficit, a morally and bureaucratically bungled reaction to Hurricane Katrina, and a loss of American prestige around the world. His kingdom for a slice!

Clinton was also stuck with ten million dollars in legal bills—the cost to him of fending off the seventy-million-dollar government investigation into the Whitewater case. For the first time in a long while, the Clintons were not tenants of the state, though this was an anxiety quickly cured. Alfred A. Knopf paid an advance of ten million dollars for Clinton's memoirs (Simon & Schuster paid eight million for Hillary's), and everyone, it seemed, was willing to spring



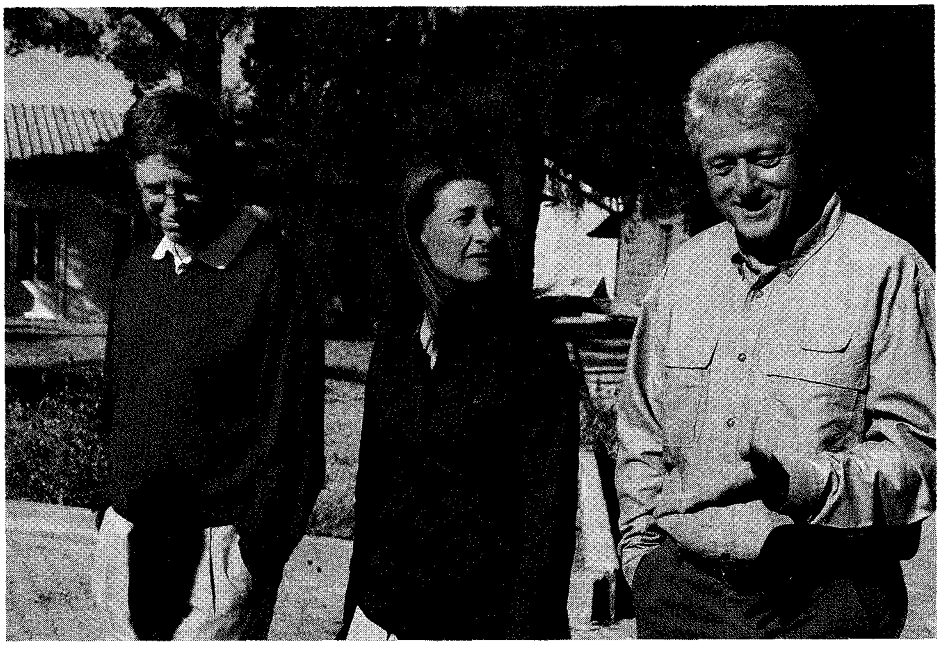
Left to right: Clinton and Nelson Mandela visiting a pediatric ward in Johannesburg; Clinton speaking at the memorial service for

EVELYN HOCKSTEIN / POLARIS; MIDDLE, RIC FELD / AFP / GETTY

for as much as two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for a lecture. In his first year out of office, Clinton gave fifty-nine speeches and made $9.2 million. On the strength of their ballooning income, Bill and Hillary easily paid the mortgages on two houses—a $1.7 million Dutch Colonial in the wealthy Westchester town of Chappaqua and a $2.85 million mansion near Embassy Row, in Washington, called Whitehaven.

According to many of his aides, Clinton enjoyed having time to read and play golf at home in Westchester, dropping in at Lange's Deli or the local Starbucks, taking walks with his chocolate Lab. But he had difficulty adjusting to his powerlessness and the instant loss of an executive-branch staff numbering in the thousands. He also had to adjust to the reality that he would never in the rest of his years be able to accomplish what he could have done in a single week as President. "He was angry about some of the bullshit—the first couple of weeks when the Bush people made a cottage industry of trashing him and the staff," Podesta said. "It didn't seem, to the extent I saw him, that he was talking to the paintings in his house, but it was an understandable letdown."

Even as he began travelling to pay his debts and his real-estate agents, Clinton was searching for a way to follow the Carter model of post-Presidential service. In the spring of 2001, he visited Gujarat, India, where an earthquake had killed some twenty thousand people. He helped raise millions of dollars in relief aid, mainly from the Indian-American community. "I think that gave him a sense that with his stature and his ability to connect with people and care about the poorest people on the planet, he did have the ability to get things done," Podesta said. "Looking back, that was a good clue to what he could do and what he would do."



Coretta Scott King; Clinton touring an H.I.V./AIDS clinic in Lesotho with Bill and Melinda Gates.

We landed in Cape Town in the late afternoon—sixteen hours after watching Zidane leave the field in disgrace. It was winter in South Africa, gray and blustery. Clinton, who had barely slept, shook hands with the middling officials who had been sent out to greet him, and (a post-White House phenomenon) waited to clear customs.

Clinton found a new direction for his foundation in 2002, at an AIDS conference in Barcelona, where Nelson Mandela took him aside and urged him to do something about the H.I.V./AIDS epidemic in Africa—in particular, the cost of anti-retroviral drugs. Mandela's influence came partly through his obvious moral example, but also through his toughness and his gestures of sympathy. In the midst of the impeachment crisis of 1998, when even many allies had distanced themselves from Clinton, Mandela spoke publicly in his support, and now Clinton could hardly refuse his entreaty for help.

Clinton began to focus on trying to drive down the price of drugs for people with AIDS in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean; he has helped reduce the cost of treatment from sixteen hundred dollars to a hundred and sixty dollars a year by lobbying heads of state in Europe and Canada to donate funds, by pressuring generic-drug manufacturers to cut prices (with the hope of making money on higher volume), and by working to set up treatment and distribution centers with Third World leaders, the United Nations, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, and nongovernmental organizations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Clinton has helped get cheap drugs to nearly half a million patients, and he hopes to increase that to two million by the end of 2008. Another of his programs, the Clinton Global Initiative, organizes an annual meeting of leaders in business, government, and charities to work on poverty, global health, climate change, and conflict resolution; the foundation staff makes sure that any group or individual who does not come through on a pledge is not invited back.

Clinton's Africa trip was beginning with a Government Leaders Forum sponsored by Microsoft. Clinton had good reason to cultivate Bill Gates. The investor Warren Buffett had recently announced that he would double the Gates Foundation's scale by donating thirty-one billion dollars—most of his fortune—and Gates was looking for reliable partners in the AIDS field. That night, at a hotel ballroom in Cape Town, Clinton sat down at the forum's gala with Gates, the Presidents of Zanzibar, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Burundi, and the mayor of Cape Town.

Several tables away, I was talking with Frank Giustra, a mining financier based in Vancouver, who started, ran, and sold Lions Gate Films. Giustra is in his late forties. He is short and trim and has close-cut white hair. The plane in which Clinton was touring Africa was Giustra's, an MD-87 jet, complete with leather furniture and a stateroom. Giustra told me that he was still heavily involved in business—he travels frequently to Kazakhstan, to check on mining interests he has there—but that his wife had been pushing him to give away more of his money.

"All of my chips, almost, are on Bill Clinton," he said. "He's a brand, a worldwide brand, and he can do things and ask for things that no one else can."

Clinton is the first post-President to tap into the newer generation of wealth—the hedge-fund and retail moguls, who have bigger planes to lend and more cash to burn than their upper-class predecessors ever had. Ronald Burkle, a supermarket tycoon, is another frequent travelling companion and airplane lender; Burkle made Clinton a partner in one of his investment funds. Clinton's appeal for these tycoons is obvious: in exchange for giving money to a good cause—the Clinton Foundation's budget last year was thirty million dollars—you not only have the usual tax break and the knowledge that you are doing good but also get to play Oh Hell until five in the morning with a two-term ex-President who knows how to have a good time. You become a certified Friend of Bill, which still has some currency, six years after one Clinton White House and, possibly, two years before another. Writing a check to the March of Dimes hardly provides the same multi-layered reward.

The Clinton Foundation's offices are at 125th Street and Lenox Avenue, in the heart of the Harlem shopping district. Clinton usually spends about seven or eight days a month there. On trips abroad for the foundation, he devotes himself wholly to AIDS, but, one of his advisers said, "when we're home, we only use him when we need to." From ten to fifteen days a month, he is on the road, raising money for the foundation, speaking for personal profit or for good causes, and, increasingly, campaigning for Democratic candidates for office. Clinton plans to celebrate his sixtieth birthday with parties doubling as fund-raisers for the foundation; the Rolling Stones will play at one, at the Beacon Theatre, in New York, in late October.

"Which entrée raises the fewest ethical issues?"

In the morning, Clinton was scheduled to appear onstage at a hotel in downtown Cape Town, in conversation with Bill Gates. Clinton's staff had been up late trying to formulate a response to Bush's press secretary, Tony Snow, who had told reporters that the Clinton Administration had been craven in the face of North Korea's insistence on building a nuclear weapon. Clinton's emissaries, Snow declared, had gone to the North Koreans with "flowers and chocolates" and "a basketball signed by Michael Jordan" and "many other inducements for the 'Dear Leader' to try to agree not to develop nuclear weapons, and it failed." Six years into their Administration and the Bush people were still attacking like insurgents. Jay Carson drafted a response saying, "It's unfortunate that the Bush Administration's TV spin master is manufacturing excuses for North Korea's transgressions instead of looking at the last six years of inaction and the abandonment of diplomacy."

Clinton and Gates make an odd pair, not only in personality but also because the Clinton Administration's Justice Department spent so much effort prosecuting Microsoft for alleged anti-trust violations. The staffs of both men, however, talked blithely about the meeting of "the most famous man in the world" and "the richest man in the world." In the AIDS field, Clinton is the secondary player. The Gates Foundation is incomparably richer than any other, and its ambitions are profound: to develop vaccines for malaria, tuberculosis, and AIDS.

As Gates was speaking, I looked at Clinton. Studying him, you begin to appreciate one of his political gifts: he is an expert *watcher*. The night before, as a children's choir sang some of the freedom songs of the townships, Clinton let his lips slip slightly apart, an expression signalling pleasure and awe, and here, as Gates described his interest in technology—"The computer you have now is a million times as powerful as the computers Microsoft first made software for"—he nodded, narrowing his eyes. He was projecting fixed engagement with the same intensity with which Nancy Reagan used to project adoration.

Neither Clinton nor Gates conceals a taste for battle, even a measure of ruthlessness, but the two also share a colossal, even misty, optimism. "On the health side, we can expect unbelievable progress," Gates said of the next quarter-century in Africa. "Given that time frame, we should expect a pretty incredible continent where a kid born here can expect the same opportunities as a kid from the United States can."

"Well, I *hope* that's right," Clinton said.

The next morning, we flew to Durban, where Gates and Clinton were to visit a clinic that was testing the use of microbicides, vaginal gels that scientists hope will prevent H.I.V. infections among women. Gates has put $123 million into microbicide research. Clinton showed up in an olive-and-khaki outfit of safari crispness. In political circles, this particular look is called "disaster casual."

Gates peppered the head of the trial project, Dr. Gita Ramjee, who was giving a PowerPoint presentation, with a series of questions about biochemistry and the structure of her research. At one point, Ramjee broke down the costs of the project, and it became clear that salaries were consuming a dominant share of the budget. Gates did some long division in his head and calculated that salaries for clinicians appeared to be well over a hundred thousand dollars a year.

"That seems pretty high, doesn't it?" he said.

Ramjee tried to skip past the question. Gates was having none of it.

"Can we go back to my question for a second?"

ARTISANAL
POTTERY
ARTISAN
KOREN

Clinton looked at Gates for a moment. There was a trace of an admiring smile on his face.

"Doesn't that seem *high*?"

The Kingdom of Lesotho is a tiny independent state inscribed into the territory of eastern South Africa. It has the dry, mountainous terrain, the windswept buttes and mesas you'd see in a film by John Ford. Lesotho is rural and poor, and about a quarter of the population is H.I.V.-positive. Slowly, the villages are emptying out. There is little work beyond subsistence farming, and any young person with an ounce of ambition and some money to make the trip heads for the townships and cities of South Africa.

We left the airstrip in a string of vans and cars and drove along rocky, ascending roads toward a village called Mafeteng. After half an hour, we pulled up to a low-slung clinic, where Clinton and Gates were greeted by doctors, patients, and every dignitary, it seemed, in the Kingdom of Lesotho. The women ululated their welcome, and a banner read "Knowing Whether You Are H.I.V. Positive or Not Is the First Step Toward Your Confident Future."

While the two Bills were getting a tour, I met a young woman in her early twenties named Tsopang who said that she had contracted H.I.V. after being raped. Many village women in Lesotho and throughout Africa even now refuse to be tested for the virus for fear of being stigmatized. Tsopang, however, was tested and began receiving anti-retroviral drugs, and now she worked at the clinic as a counsellor to help other young women with the same problems.

"I heard the name Bill Gates," she said, "but the name only. A rich man in America. I heard of Clinton, too. But just a little."

Everyone gathered in the courtyard of the clinic: the dignitaries, some patients, the doctors, Clinton, Gates, and—the fulcrum of the gathering—the camera crews. An important reason for these trips to Africa is to accumulate press clippings and television time as free advertising for more fund-raising.

In case the press does not do the job, the foundation has its own photographer and a videographer filming Clinton's every step and gesture.

Just as Gates commanded the talk—and the facts—at the microbicide briefing in Durban, Clinton took command of the political theatre in Lesotho. When the speeches began—first the head doctor, then some testimonials by patients who had been near death and whose lives had been saved at the clinic—Clinton stood hand in hand with an adorable seven-year-old girl named Arriet; she was smiling, wearing a cardigan and a blue polka-dot dress with a petticoat peeking out. Arriet was born with H.I.V. and had been in treatment for the past eight months, we were told; she was healthy and was going to school.

"Look at this girl," Clinton said, "and the life she's going to have, how strong she is."

Arriet knew that she was being talked about and, like an accomplished child star, smiled an impossibly wide smile. The cameras obliged her, clicking like mad. By late afternoon, Arriet's image and her story would be on the wires.

As we headed back to the vans, Gates allowed himself to be impressed by Clinton's mastery of public relations. "We do macro—we learn from individual cases—but we're about new vaccines," Gates said. "But President Clinton is doing fantastic work and plays a unique role shining a light on the problem. We're really doing complementary things."

Not long before leaving for Africa, I had lunch with a senior official in the Clinton Administration who said that, while the foundation's work in public health has been effective, "the motive for Clinton's advocacy work is simple—he is trying to atone for what he did not do about AIDS and Rwanda when he was President." The former official went on, "His failure as President on AIDS is incredible. He knew all about the issue, but he let people push him away from it. The O.M.B. people told him he had a congressionally mandated budget cap that he had to observe, but there was never any effort to challenge the Republican Congress. The great question is why he didn't do more in Africa, where he is a rock star, and it goes to the negative side of the balance sheet of the Clinton Presidency."

The Clinton circle tries its best to deflect that narrative. On the plane, Ira Magaziner, an old family friend who worked with Hillary Clinton on the ill-fated health-care initiative and now does AIDS work for the foundation, came back to brief us. Magaziner made his fortune as a business consultant but his affect is that of a professorial shlump. He travels for weeks with a carry-on bag and generally wears the same suit, a heroically enduring olive-green number. Slouching on the arm of a seat, Magaziner said that the foundation prides itself not only on its results but also on its efficiency and its tight budgets. It works quickly, pays modest salaries, and avoids creating what is known in the AIDS world as "gold-plated programs"—glossy models that generate more publicity and self-congratulation than results.

Stephen Lewis, Kofi Annan's personal envoy on H.I.V./AIDS, was in Lesotho and told me, "Clinton and his people move with tremendous urgency—call it a sense of emergency—that is qualitatively different from everyone in the field. It's the sheer force of his personality and the tremendous access he has. The way they work is so focussed and with such energy that I know of no parallel as I wander around Southern Africa."

In 1997, at Morgan State University, in Baltimore, Clinton declared that government and science should work to find an AIDS vaccine by 2007. But his rhetoric outstripped the actions he took. "The Invisible People," by Greg Behrman, describes the Clinton Administration as timid and unwilling to propose greater spending to help stanch the spread of the virus in the Third World. When the South African government fought drug patents in order to get cheaper drugs, the Clinton Administration backed the American pharmaceutical companies. The Administration did increase domestic spending on AIDS, but Magaziner's explanation for the Clintons' seeming lassitude regarding the Third World was lame: he claimed that the early and middle nineties had been the "heavy infection period," and that, because AIDS symptoms do not typically appear in an infected person for several years—and because there has been such a negligible rate of testing in Africa—"it wasn't until 2001, 2002 that we had a crisis."

"And let's not forget the political situation at the time," Jay Carson said.

"It's hard to describe the atmosphere," Magaziner said, clearly referring to the Republican attacks on Clinton, the Whitewater investigations, and the antipathy to foreign aid among conservatives.

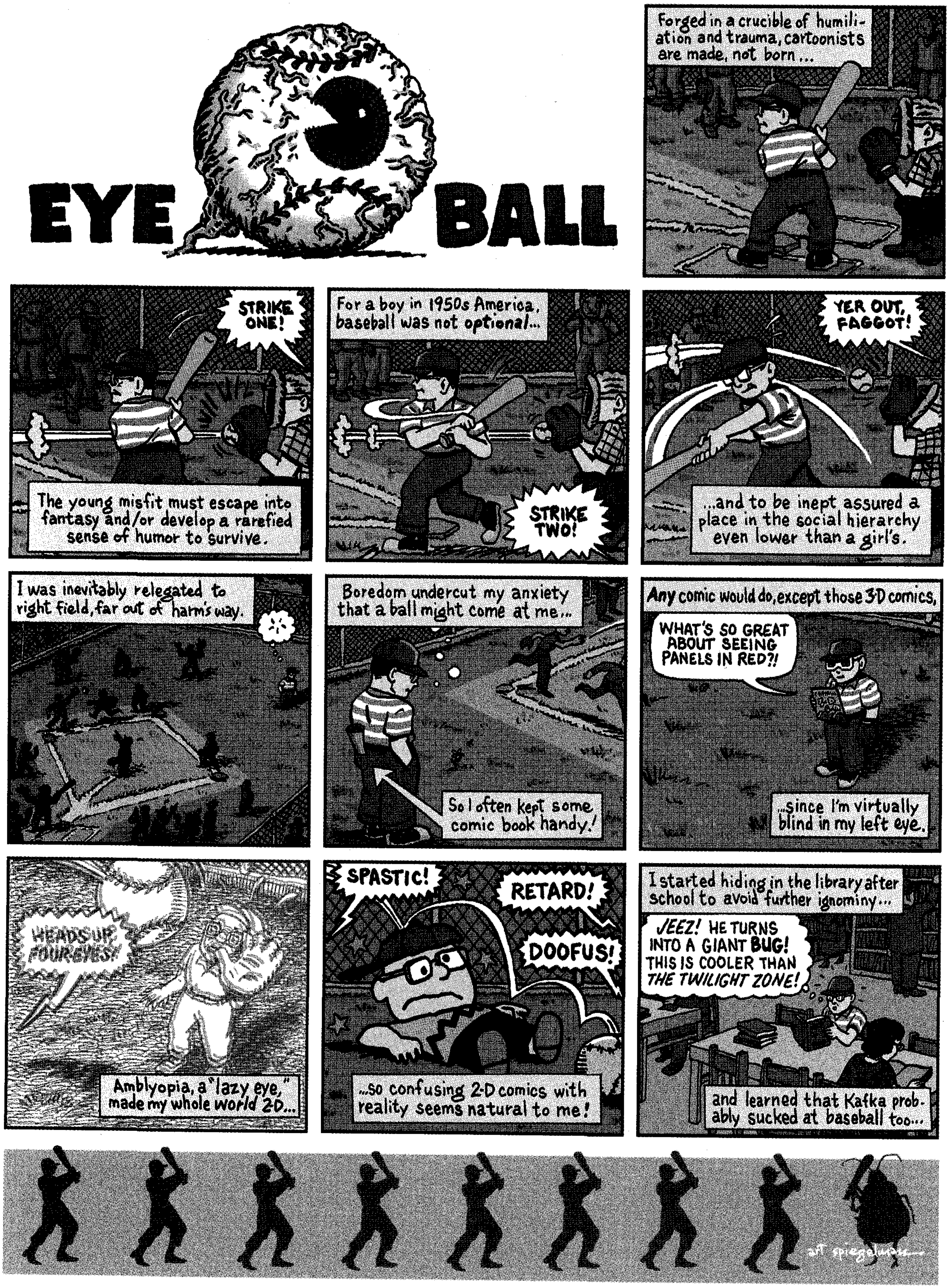
And Carson added, "The evangelicals weren't on board yet."

It is true that it took time for figures such as Rick Warren and Franklin Graham, and influential conservatives in Congress, like Jesse Helms, to come around on AIDS. But the idea that it was not until the early Bush years that we knew "we had a crisis" is hardly credible. In January, 2000, the Clinton Administration's Ambassador to the United Nations, Richard Holbrooke, helped organize a monthlong Security Council session during which the global AIDS crisis was declared a threat to international security.

Many of the leading activists and scientists in the H.I.V./AIDS field are so grateful for the Clinton Foundation's current activities and so loath to alienate Clinton that they only reluctantly criticize his record as President. Nevertheless, some wish that he were more focussed on elimination of the disease. Seth Berkley, the president and founder of the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative, praised Clinton for using his influence and "charisma" to work on treatment strategies and drive drug prices down, but he said, "The sad truth is that today's plans for dealing with the epidemic are clearly unsustainable. If we don't find a way to slow down or stop it, AIDS will sap the life out of many societies. My wish is that Clinton would put ending the epidemic back at the top of his AIDS advocacy, and match his current work on AIDS treatment with renewed leadership to create a vaccine." AIDS is spreading so fast that no treatment, not even effective, cheap drugs, can stop it. Worldwide, eight thousand people die of the disease every day.

"I agree that the vaccine is the big kahuna," Clinton said. "Now, here's the problem. Most of that has to be done either by governments or, frankly, by the Gates Foundation, because they've

COMIC STRIP BY ART SPIEGELMAN


EYE BALL
Forged in a crucible of humiliation and trauma, cartoonists are made, not born...
STRIKE ONE!
The young misfit must escape into fantasy and/or develop a rarefied sense of humor to survive.
For a boy in 1950s America, baseball was not optional...
STRIKE TWO!
YER OUT, FAGGOT!
...and to be inept assured a place in the social hierarchy even lower than a girl's.
I was inevitably relegated to right field, far out of harm's way.
Boredom undercut my anxiety that a ball might come at me...
So I often kept some comic book handy!
Any comic would do, except those 3-D comics,
WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT SEEING PANELS IN RED?!
...since I'm virtually blind in my left eye.
HEADS UP, FOUREYES!
Amblyopia, a "lazy eye," made my whole world 2-D...
SPASTIC!
RETARD!
DOOFUS!
...so confusing 2-D comics with reality seems natural to me!
I started hiding in the library after school to avoid further ignominy...
JEEZ! HE TURNS INTO A GIANT BUG! THIS IS COOLER THAN THE TWILIGHT ZONE!
and learned that Kafka probably sucked at baseball too...
art spiegelman

"Let's get Junkie—he'll know what to do!"

got the bread, the money. In the meanwhile, somebody's got to try and keep these people alive, keep as many people as possible from becoming H.I.V.-infected in the first place, and set up health-care systems that can deal with the corollary consequences of t.b., malaria, and all the other health issues. So I don't disagree with Seth, and I would be glad to do more to be an advocate. But somebody needs to do what I'm doing. I'm not a scientist who can do the research myself, and I don't have billions of dollars to pour into it, like the government or the Gates Foundation. I think I'm doing what is best for me to do, and what will save the largest number of lives."

Clinton deflects the tougher criticism of his inaction on AIDS during his Presidency with a maddeningly homey reference. He told me that Chelsea wrote a thesis at Oxford that dealt, in part, with his Administration's reaction to the AIDS crisis.

"I gave you a grade," she told her father.

"What did I get?" Clinton asked.

"C-plus."

Clinton told me, "She studied what we did, what everybody else did, and I said, 'What do you think?' She said, 'You didn't do nearly enough. But you did more than anyone else in the world.'"

Clinton told the story with such good humor that you would have thought he'd received an A-minus. And, while he gives Bush credit for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, a five-year fifteen-billion-dollar plan that was introduced in 2003 (despite the reservations he has about the anti-condom and pro-abstinence message that the right wing insisted on attaching to the program), he is quick to give himself, and his White House, a mulligan. "I applaud what they did," Clinton said. "But to say that the same thing was *possible* when I was President is naïve, and a distortion of the way things were."

"I almost *died!*"

This was Bill Clinton considering the fragile state of his life in the autumn of 2004.

It was a cool evening out by the buffet table and the glittering pool of the Saxon, a five-star hotel in Johannesburg. And, as Clinton talked about his once clogged arteries and how they almost killed him, he attacked a dinner of chicken satay, seared sesame tuna, fried shrimp, noodles, and sautéed vegetables. The owner of the Saxon, and Clinton's host, was a Roy Orbison look-alike named Douw Steyn, a businessman who made a fortune in rental cars, insurance, and other investments. The suites at the Saxon go for more than two thousand dollars a night. Nelson Mandela finished his memoirs in one after leaving prison.

Clinton wore a black shirt and black trousers and the beginnings of a ruddy sunburn.

"I'm telling you," he was saying, "I almost *died!*"

At first, the talk had been about Mandela's health—he was turning eighty-eight in a few days and Clinton was scheduled to meet him the next morning—and how political prisoners trapped in small jail cells discover, in time, that their muscles wither for lack of exercise and a man's walk becomes a shuffle. "It's those *tiny* muscles here that drag around the biggest ones in your body, you see, and—" Clinton's recitation on muscular mechanics turned to exercise and how he had discovered, at the age of fifty-eight, and after many years of dutiful jogging, that he could no longer run a mile without stopping. Regular exercise, his cardiologist determined, had not been enough to cancel out a lifetime of doughnuts and French fries.

On September 6, 2004, Clinton had emergency quadruple-bypass surgery in New York and, six months later, another operation to repair his injured chest cavity. He was now just weeks away from his sixtieth birthday. Running is out, but he takes long daily walks and a private trainer works with him in his home gym in Chappaqua. With renewed health has also come an insouciant fatalism. "I've reached an age now where it doesn't matter whatever happens to me," he says repeatedly. "I just don't want anyone to die before their time anymore."

Clinton talks like that a lot these days. Born three months after his biological father was thrown from a car wreck and died in a ditch, he has always lived with a sense of ambitious urgency. Just three pages into his memoir, "My Life," he writes:

> My father left me with the feeling that I had to live for two people, and that if I did it well enough, somehow I could make up for the life he should have had. And his memory infused me, at a younger age than most, with a sense of my own mortality. The knowledge that I, too, could die young drove me both to try to drain the most out of every moment of life and to get on with the next big challenge. Even when I wasn't sure where I was going, I was always in a hurry.

Clinton's grandfather died at fifty-six, his stepfather at fifty-nine; his father was twenty-eight. He says that he remembers "distinctly" the day that he had lived one day longer than his father. Some of his happiest hours have been spent wandering through cemeteries, reading the headstones. The sense of trying to cram two lifetimes into one, of always being in a hurry, he said at a conference in Colorado last year, "caused me to make a lot of mistakes. It caused me to work too hard, and most of the personal and political mistakes I made in my life were because I tried to do too much and was exhausted. But I also got a lot done."

After his heart surgeries, Clinton told me, he did not fall into the kind of depression that so many patients describe. Instead, once he had passed the most trying weeks he felt less impatient about "the nickel-and-dime stuff."

"I'm more likely to be grateful to see the sun come up in the morning," he said, "and I try to make a determined effort to enjoy every day and, in a funny way, simultaneously to think more about the future in constructive ways but to live more in the moment. And I noticed an interesting thing when I went home after I left the White House, once I got over being mad. I had more time to myself than at any time probably since I'd been in law school, maybe even since I'd been in England. And I was very happy in England. I was young, I didn't mind, I travelled a lot alone. I was alone a lot as a kid. I was never bored."

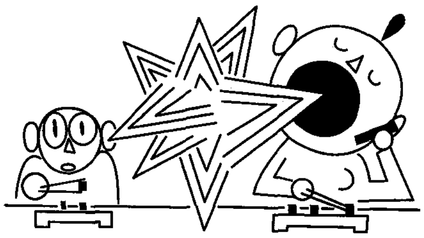
Over dinner at the Saxon, though, Clinton hardly seemed a hunched solitary soul. He was a happy warrior, Hubert Horatio Humphrey in modern dress, performing. He needed little prodding to soliloquize on the killer instincts and hypocrisies of Newt Gingrich when he was Speaker of the House; on the "crucial differences" on Iraq between Joe Lieberman and the rest of the Democrats in the Senate (read: Hillary); on the complications of building a Presidential library and its fantastic cost ($165 million); and on a crocodile he saw on his last trip to South Africa ("That boy was as wide as my wingspan, I swear to God!").

At around eleven, Clinton suddenly wandered off to talk with Douw Steyn. Half an hour later, though, he returned, accepted a cup of black coffee, and said, "I want to sit down and hear what you guys are talking about!" He picked up the thread of his monologue, describing in fantastic detail why Ray Nagin edged Mitch Landrieu in the New Orleans mayoral race ("I understand it, because I know how black folks think"), which led to a story about the uninhibited (and currently incarcerated) ex-governor of Louisiana Edwin Edwards, and then on to another retired pol, Boris Yeltsin. Vladimir Putin invited Clinton to a seventy-fifth birthday party for Yeltsin at the Kremlin this year. The foreign guest list had been limited to Clinton and the former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, along with the more dubious company of Aleksandr Lukashenko, of Belarus, and Leonid Kuchma, of Ukraine.

"Putin is one sly dog," Clinton said, laughing. "He got up there and said, 'Well, tonight we have Kohl, Clinton—and all the dictators.'" Somebody asked if Lukashenko, who continues to run his country as a personal fief, was insulted.

"Are you kidding?" Clinton said. "Guys like that consider that a compliment!"

He seemed nostalgic for his old cadre, and was full of praise for Yeltsin, despite the Chechen war and corruption in the Kremlin; clearly he still relished their relationship. "I don't care how drunk he was sometimes," he said. "Yeltsin really hated Communism." He recalled that in his Kremlin office Yeltsin had portraits of Catherine the Great, Peter the Great, Alexander II, who freed the serfs—"no Commies." Clinton credited Putin with being "extremely smart" but said he was concerned that he was building what amounts to a "tsarist system," in which "oil is like America's military, its weapon to play on the world stage." Yeltsin, he said, appointed Putin as his successor because he knew that he would not pursue his family in the courts for corruption—"He has shown great respect for him"—but also because Putin "could sit on his behind and read memos and documents fourteen hours a day and make decisions." Clinton said he wished that Bush hadn't been so "gushy" about Putin in the beginning, conjecturing about the goodness of the Russian President's soul, but the Administration is making a mistake now, he said, by criticizing him so often.



Clinton evidently sees himself as an exemplary blend of idealist and political roughneck, someone who never stood down from the cheap attacks, impeachment included. Hour after hour, that was what infused his anecdotes, his policy rambles, his assessments of the political landscape: toughness in the service of doing good. He admires this in himself; he believes it's what set him apart from Walter Mondale, Michael Dukakis, Al Gore, and John Kerry. "We've got to be in the *winning* business," he would say, "because without *winning*"—without taking power—"it's the other guy, and the other guy's ideas, that prevail." And, evidently, the only Democrat on the scene who he feels is both ready for the big battle and has the stomach to win it is the very person who will attract the harshest attacks. That Democrat, of course, is Hillary Rodham Clinton. And so, in the middle of the night, Bill Clinton was doing his part, criticizing Joe Lieberman's support for preëmptive war (even as he was preparing to campaign for him in the Democratic primary) and describing why it was fine to be for congressional legislation criminalizing flag-burning but opposed to a constitutional amendment permitting such legislation (to justify Hillary's triangulation on that score).

Toward the end of the evening, as Clinton finished a final cup of coffee—"This stuff doesn't really have an effect on me, I guess"—someone asked him whether it wasn't frustrating to be talking about the Presidential hopes of other people, even if one of them was his wife.

Clinton smiled. "No, not at all," he said. Look at all the good work he was trying to get done in Africa, the fun he was having. The important thing, he said, was to find something you like to do and do it. Then he shrugged and said, "You have to bloom where you're planted."

A couple of weeks before the Africa trip, I'd followed Clinton to New Hampshire. He went to Manchester to do a campaign event for the Democratic governor there, John Lynch, to play a round of golf with some friends, to go to a reception with old allies from the 1992 campaign, and to give a short speech at an "obesity event." (Since his heart surgery, Clinton has worked with the American Heart Association to campaign against childhood obesity.)

The Suburban driving him from the golf course pulled up to the Radisson Hotel an hour or so behind schedule. He was beaming. A local TV reporter put a microphone in front of him and asked him what he'd shot. "Eighty-one, eighty-two," he said. "Not bad for an old man."

A few minutes later, Clinton and his caravan charged out of the driveway with motorcycle escorts and travelled approximately one and a half blocks, to the Athens Restaurant, heralded in a framed review as "the best Greek restaurant in Manchester, New Hampshire."

"A lot of these people started with me in '91," Clinton said. "Some are friends for thirty years."

There were hugs, cell-phone snapshots, and a lot of talking and joking around, base-touching with the Democratic core of New Hampshire.

As Clinton and his staff were edging toward the door, a woman came up to him and said, "Mr. President, we thought you could say a few words."

Clinton's eyes brightened in gratitude. Chairs were assembled in a semi-circle around him.

"Thanks for coming out to see me," he said. "It makes me feel like less of a has-been."

And then, as he began a *tour d'horizon* of Republican perfidy and the elections ahead, it was as if we were back in the winter of 1991.

"The Republicans are brilliant at creating bogus issues, cartoon cutouts," he said, "and the press, even if it doesn't agree with them, brings it along." He said that he was especially infuriated by the way the Administration's rhetoric painted anyone who criticized any aspect of its policy in Iraq as weak on national security. Almost as infuriating was the way the Democrats were beating each other up about the past (in other words: Hillary's 2002 Senate vote authorizing the President to use force in Iraq) rather than forming a coherent alternative to the White House's stay-the-course rhetoric. "This deal with Iraq makes me want to throw up," he said. "I'm sick and tired of being told that if you voted for authorization you voted for the war. It was a mistake, and I would have made it, too. And Congress made it once before, at the Gulf of Tonkin resolution." The blame was with the White House: "The Administration did not shoot straight on the nuclear issue or on Saddam's supposed ties to Al Qaeda prior to 9/11."

Clinton said that he had read Ron Suskind's article in the *Times Magazine* in which an unnamed Bush aide says, mockingly, that journalists and Democrats languish in a "reality-based community" while the White House, as the vanguard of an American empire, creates its own realities. "That's an amazing paradigm," Clinton said. "We ought to run on that."

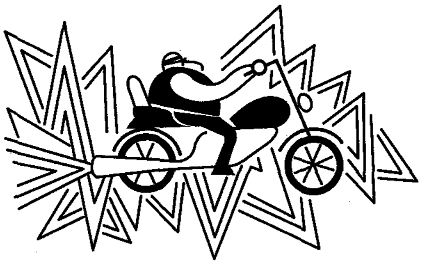
More than a year in advance, Clinton was clearly concerned that debate within the Democratic Party, particularly over Iraq, would hurt Hillary's chances. He didn't mention his wife. But he did tell the crowd in the Athens Restaurant, "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good."

Finally, it really was time to go. These people had jobs, after all.

"Thank you," Clinton said by way of closing. "I *love* you guys."

In the world of William Jefferson Clinton, there are constituents and potential constituents. In the afternoon, he visited Parkside Middle School for the "obesity event." A few hundred kids were sitting on the floor of a sweltering gymnasium while the governor's wife lectured them, complete with PowerPoint presentation and statistics on caloric density, on the perils of fast food. She sounded like the Carrie Nation of the Chicken McNugget.

Clinton has successfully lobbied soft-drink manufacturers to keep sugary beverages out of school vending machines. He allowed that his old eating habits had contributed to the heart condition that almost killed him, and said that, "as a former husky kid," he wanted to "do more than a few public-service announcements" to help American kids lose weight.



"We're done with the soft drinks, and now we're gonna work with the snack people," he told a few local reporters.

After Clinton was introduced, he stripped off his jacket and sat on a high stool. "When I was a little boy," he said to the kids, "I was bigger than almost all of you. Now there are more kids like I was." He told them about learning to exercise more and suggested they watch a show on Nickelodeon called "Let's Just Play Go Healthy Challenge."

When the question period began, a chubby kid, no more than seven, nervously held the microphone and asked Clinton, "What if you don't have the channel?"

His quavery voice betrayed such a sense of terror and deprivation that a lot of the kids laughed. *What? No Nickelodeon? It's basic cable!*

Clinton had clearly heard the laughing and seen the terror in the kid's eyes, and he sensed the embarrassment that would likely haunt his nights, and so he said, "A *lot* of people don't have the channel. So that's a good question. A *great* question."

The jaws of life! The boy smiled. His whole body seemed to relax. The laughing stopped. It was a *great* question! And while Clinton went on to talk about other ways kids could learn about eating more sensibly, it was easy to believe that this kid—still a little shaken, but relieved of his shame—would vote for a Clinton one day if he could.

In Johannesburg the next morning, Clinton was to meet Nelson Mandela at Sunninghill Hospital, at a fund-raising event for a cardiac ward named for Mandela's late comrade Walter Sisulu.

The doctors and administrators greeted Mandela with cheers, and women in native dress sang to him in Zulu: "Prepare your things, the time is coming." With a carved ivory cane in one hand, and with his second wife, Graca Machel, the former First Lady of Mozambique, holding the other, he did not so much walk as skate along the hospital floor tiles. The iconic old revolutionary has grown so venerable that the airports

A PASTURE POEM

This upstart thistle
Is young and touchy; it is
All barb and bristle,

Threatening to wield
Its green, jagged armament
Against the whole field.

Butterflies will dare
Nonetheless to lay their eggs
In that angle where

The leaf meets the stem,
So that ants or browsing cows
Cannot trouble them.

Summer will grow old
As will the thistle, letting
A clenched bloom unfold

To which the small hum
Of bee wings and the flash of
Goldfinch wings will come,

Till its purple crown
Blanches, and the breezes strew
The whole field with down.

—*Richard Wilbur*

of South Africa sell Mandela dolls the way the gift shops of Mount Vernon sell George Washington dolls. But while Mandela has become frail—he wears hearing aids in both ears and limits his public appearances—he has lost little of his magnetism. His smile is broad and lively, and he made funny remarks to the people who greeted him at the door and on the way to the elevator, and his look—well, only he can get away with those phantasmagorical long-sleeved floral shirts that he wears; anyone else would come off like a vacationing podiatrist from New Rochelle. Mandela was led to a waiting room near the recovery ward for kids who had just gone through cardiac surgery. He sank into an armchair and chatted for fifteen minutes with his wife and with Sisulu's widow, Albertina, awaiting the arrival of his American friend.

When Clinton turned up at last—astonishingly, he will make anyone wait for him, even a global patriarch who is presumably his moral hero—he was wearing an odd get-up, a dark suit and a black polo shirt. His lapels obscured the full logo on the shirt and all you could see were the numerals "666." A curious omen.

"Madiba!" he said, using the tribal name that nearly everyone in South Africa uses for Mandela. "Madiba, it's so good to see you!"

"Bill!"

Clinton squatted near Mandela's chair and hugged him tenderly. Then, holding the old man by the elbow, he helped him to his feet.

"So, what is your instruction?" Mandela said jokingly to a doctor named Robin Kinsley, who ran the ward.

The ward was spotless, high-tech, and Kinsley guided the two men from bed to bed to meet the children.

"Madiba, this is a unique problem," Kinsley said, leading the group (cameras included) to the bed of a boy from Botswana named Neil. "This little chap developed two leaking valves."

"Hey, Neil, how are you?" Mandela said.

The boy winced. He'd had his chest cracked open just the day before. If ever Bill Clinton could feel someone's pain, it was now.

"I'll bet Neil's a little sore, aren't you?" he said.

Neil smiled and nodded.

After the tour, we went to an atrium in the hospital where Walter Sisulu's son announced that, in order to raise money for the hospital, they were going to auction off a chance to have tea with Albertina Sisulu and Mandela.

"If Tiger Woods can get over a million dollars for charity by playing a round of golf with someone," he declared, "imagine what we'll get by offering tea with two legends."

Sisulu introduced Clinton as "His Excellency."

"I basically always try to show up around Madiba's birthday," Clinton said.

"I'll soon be sixty," he went on. "And, at a certain point, the definition of young is anyone who is a year younger than you are." He paid tribute to the doctors and nurses who had given the children in the hospital a chance to have a normal life. He dwelled for a few moments on the fighting then just beginning in Lebanon and northern Israel and lamented that so many were still "trapped in the age-old illusion that somehow we can lift ourselves up through violence." Then, by way of paying tribute to Mandela and Sisulu, Clinton recited from Seamus Heaney's "The Cure at Troy":

> History says, Don't hope
> On this side of the grave.
> But then, once in a lifetime
> The longed-for tidal wave
> Of justice can rise up,
> And hope and history rhyme.

The man sitting next to me—tiny, trig, powerfully built—was in tears. He was the former flyweight boxing champion of the world.

Mandela and Clinton returned to the Saxon for lunch. By now it had been explained that Clinton's shirt was not a tribute to Satan but a gift from Mandela. It bore his prison number at Robben Island—46664.

"He just sent it to me," Clinton said.

Mandela asked Clinton why Chelsea hadn't come to Africa. "Is she O.K.?" he said.

"Oh, she's great," Clinton said. "She's working for McKinsey in New York. She solves problems for people. She knows more than me or her mother. Which she tells us in every conversation."

"That's good," Mandela said, laughing. "And why didn't Hillary come?"

Clinton shrugged. "You got the only unemployed member of our family."

"Are you really unemployed?" Mandela's wife asked.

"Let's just say I have more control over what I do and when I do it," Clinton said.

The lunch party, led by Douw Steyn, headed toward the dining room. Steyn was wearing a black suit, wraparound shades, and gleaming shoes.

"You look pretty shiny today, Douw," Clinton told his host. Douw didn't smile.

During the lunch, Mandela told a story about being released from jail during the apartheid era to meet with South Africa's leaders. Prison officials came to his cell to fit him for a suit, he recalled, because it would not do to meet the white politicians in his prison clothes. When they dressed him, they grew frustrated that Mandela didn't know how to tie the laces of his new dress shoes properly. Mandela was pleased to see the chief of the National Intelligence Service on hands and knees tying his shoes.

Clinton later admitted that he kept thinking that this could be his last meeting with Mandela. "He's as tough as nails," Clinton told me. "He didn't survive all those years in prison and come out in the shape he was in just by having a good heart. I think it takes more strength to survive something like that than it does to beat somebody up with a negative television ad. Mandela was tough, and he also was ferociously loyal to the people who were loyal to him and to his movement while he was in prison. He told me all along, 'You know, I have strange friends. The Taiwanese are my friends. If the Chinese are mad that they're coming to my inauguration, tough. They helped me. If you don't like that Castro's coming, tough—he helped me, too. The Democratic Party helped me, but so did Castro. Qaddafi, so he did a bad thing in that Pan Am 103 thing. But they stayed with us, they helped us. I'm not going to renounce my friends.'"

After lunch, Clinton walked Mandela out to his car.

"Bye, bye, Bill," Mandela said. He asked to be remembered to Hillary and Chelsea.

"I'm so happy to have seen you," Clinton said.

He helped Mandela into the back seat, closed the door, and waved as the car pulled away.

Clinton turned and headed back into the Saxon. "Did my shirt work out all right?" he asked. "Mandela dressed me today. But it was hard for me to wear it, because if you only knew how many millions of Republicans *wanted* me to go to jail."

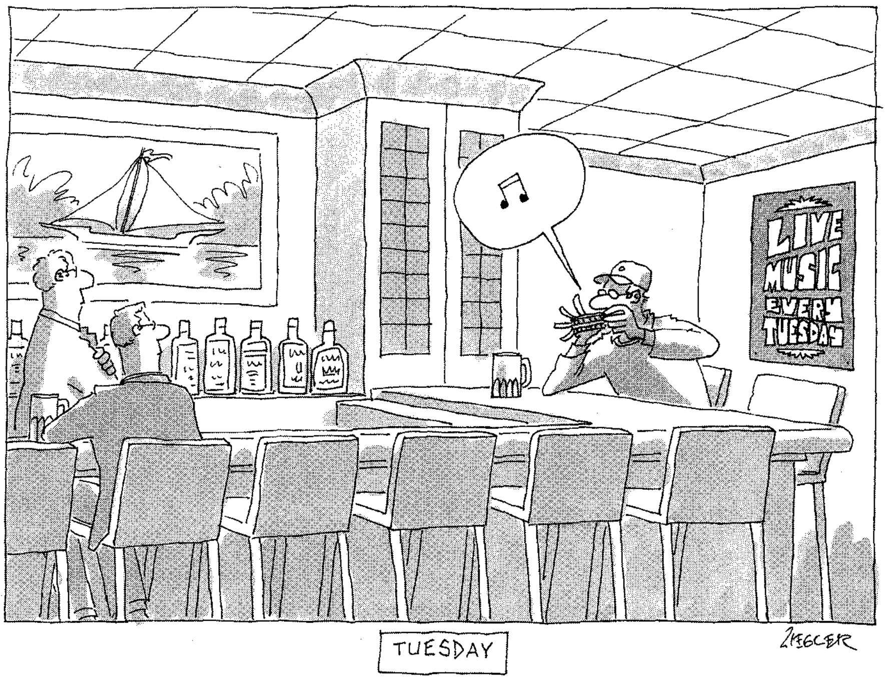
RN AIRLINE
SIPRESS

"Any chance of an upgrade to a flight that's on time?"

Few modern Presidents have consumed biographies of their predecessors as voraciously as Bill Clinton. One afternoon when we met for lunch, he reeled off a list of some of his favorite Presidential books: three lives of Grant, David Herbert Donald's Lincoln, and a novelty choice, "Jack: A Life Like No Other," by Geoffrey Perret, "which surprisingly received no coverage, and it had a lot of, kind of, *dirt* in it, like, dishy gossip I'd never heard about—Kennedy and Jayne Mansfield, and Mansfield was pregnant, stuff I'd never heard!"

As he was leaving office, Clinton told friends that he hoped to write a great book of his own, something approaching Grant's memoirs. He had admired Katharine Graham's autobiography, and so he sought out her editor at Knopf, Robert Gottlieb, who once ran the house. (Gottlieb was also, from 1987 to 1992, the editor of *The New Yorker.*) At an early meeting to talk about the book, Clinton informed the editor that he was actually very easy to work for. Gottlieb interrupted, saying, "You're working for *me* now."

Clinton had help with research, and he dictated a lot of stories to the historian Ted Widmer and to his aide Justin Cooper for later use, but he also wrote much of the book in longhand, in more than twenty spiral-bound notebooks.



TUESDAY

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When he handed in the first hundred and fifty pages of the manuscript, Gottlieb said, "This is a really good story, but let me ask you something: Are you running for anything?"

"No, I'm done," Clinton said.

"Good," Gottlieb said. "You cannot put the name of every person you've ever met in this book. I do not care what happened to their children and grandchildren, and it bothers me that my President had enough room left in his head to remember what happened to the children and grandchildren of every person he ever met."

So, Clinton said, recounting the story, "I said, 'Look, Gottlieb, I'm from Arkansas. That's what we do, that's what we care about—I can't help it. That's who we are.'"

Clinton sent another hundred pages or so, this time on the American South of his childhood. Gottlieb called and said, "I really like this."

"Well, you got any questions?" Clinton replied.

"Just one."

"What is it?" Clinton asked.

"Did you know any *sane* people as a child?"

"No, but neither did anybody else," Clinton said. "I was just paying attention more than most people."

The first half of Clinton's thousand-page memoir is a cross between "Tobacco Road" and "Ragged Dick," the Snopes saga and "All the King's Men." The early pages make clear just how far Clinton had to travel before he landed in the safe berths of the Ivy League and Oxford. One night at dinner in Africa, Clinton was talking again about the Bush circle's contempt for "reality-based" thinking, and he remarked that he had spent a large portion of his early life trying to achieve a "reality-based" state of mind, so painful was the situation in his house in Arkansas: a father who died before he was born, a stepfather who beat his mother, the night when Clinton stood up to the old man, all the threats, the alcoholism, the troubled brother, the endless secrets. At one point in the book, Clinton quotes at length from a composition, full of self-doubt, that he wrote in high school for a teacher named Lonnie Warneke:

> I am a person motivated and influenced by so many diverse forces I sometimes question the sanity of my existence. I am a living paradox—deeply religious, yet not as convinced of my exact beliefs as I ought to be; wanting responsibility yet shirking it; loving the truth but often times giving way to falsity. . . . I detest selfishness, but see it in the mirror every day. . . . I view those, some of whom are very dear to me, who have never learned how to live. I desire and struggle to be different from them, but often am almost an exact likeness. . . . I, in my attempts to be honest, will not be the hypocrite I hate.

Unfortunately, there is hardly a passage in the second half of the book—the chapters that cover his eight years as President—as exposed as that one. Clinton played it safe in his memoir, and his reasons were almost surely political. Even the publication date was politically determined. Clinton and Knopf decided that "My Life" had to come out before the 2004 campaign entered its final stage. As a result, the book was rushed and is at times almost defiantly dull. The chapters that cover 1992 to 2000 often seem as cursory and reticent as the entries in a desk diary. Grant's singularity as a memoirist is safe. But then the General's memoir ends before his Presidency begins.

Bill Clinton is an ex-President in the business of creating a successor who happens to be his wife. The way he sees it, George W. Bush and the United States Supreme Court denied him the legacy he deserved. Perhaps the wife who supported his every triumph and lifted him up after every fall, the wife he humiliated and nearly lost in 1998, will be the one to provide it.

The Clinton marriage, since we first came to know it, is perhaps the most exhaustively chronicled in political history. Antony and Cleopatra had Shakespeare and Joseph Mankiewicz; Bill and Hillary have had lesser poets—Peggy Noonan, Gail Sheehy, and R. Emmett Tyrell, Jr. When I went to Arkansas to see Clinton at his Presidential library, in Little Rock, we had a barbeque lunch in his apartment, which is built onto the library's fourth floor. The apartment has two distinctive characteristics: the first is a study shaped precisely like the Oval Office; the second is Bill and Hillary's bedroom. "As you can see," Clinton said, leading me around the place, "it's glass, floor to ceiling." A glass bedroom for the Clintons—as if they needed a metaphor to underscore their constant exposure. When Clinton was preparing to leave office, six years ago, John F. Harris, the Washington *Post's* White House correspondent, wrote, "The Clinton years have enveloped all America in one dysfunctional family. Things that once seemed extravagantly weird—a President who goes to pastoral therapy sessions once a week to recover from his sex addiction; a First Lady who moves out of the

White House to run for office in a state where she never lived—now seem routine." A race in 2008 would likely mean a return to the weirdness.

"Their marriage is the black hole at the center of the drama," a former senior official in the Clinton White House told me. "We are living through one of the worst Administrations in American history—there is a world crisis—and our whole future can be affected by this marital relationship as it affects the next election."

If, as seems likely, Hillary Clinton is reëlected to the Senate in November, she will have to decide quickly whether to run for President or be content with a career representing the State of New York and, perhaps, assuming the Democratic leadership. The many staff members and Clinton confidants I spoke to said that the chances of her running are between eighty and ninety per cent.

Two things could still hold her back. One would be a straightforward political calculation that she would probably lose. In the race for the nomination she could falter because of a powerful anti-war sentiment in the Democratic Party base, or she could get tripped up by John Edwards in Iowa or face a surprise candidate, like Al Gore. A series of early losses might undercut her advantages in money, name recognition, and organization. Many Democrats have grown dismayed with her positions on everything from the war to flag burning. If Hillary Clinton advances to the general election, she may not be able to overcome her own negatives or a candidate like John McCain.

"She might not run if she decides she can't win, but it may be that a part of Hillary will look around and say, 'Where are the giants that are going to beat me?'" one member of her circle said. "'People around me said I couldn't run for the Senate in 2000 and win in New York. They said I couldn't be a good senator and fit in to one of the most subtle public institutions, but, by all accounts, I've done just that. So why not me? Yes, forty per cent will be against me. I get it. But forty will be with me, and the race is all about the rest. Don't you think I have as good a chance as Evan Bayh? As Bill Richardson?'"

The second factor militating against a run has to do with the Clinton marriage. Do the Clintons (to say nothing of the voters) want to go through it all again? The members of Hillary's inner circle—the political consultant Mandy Grunwald; the pollster Mark Penn; her chief of staff, Tamera Luzzatto; the head of her fund-raising apparatus, Patti Solis Doyle—talk about numbers and policy with her constantly, but I was told repeatedly that no one around her raises "the Bill factor" without trepidation. And yet these aides are acutely aware of what is likely to influence the Senator's decision.

"With any presumptive front-runners—take Mario Cuomo or even Colin Powell—the reasons they get in the race or not are usually more personal than poll-driven," one of Hillary Clinton's closest advisers told me. "She has to ask herself, 'Do I want twelve armed men following my daughter around? And what about my ninety-year-old mother—do I want her reading all these things about me?' If you held a gun to my head, I'd guess that she will run, but if, nine months from now, I woke up to an A.P. report saying she was going to forgo the race, I would not be absolutely shocked."

What effect Bill Clinton would have on a Hillary Clinton candidacy is, after the war in Iraq, probably the most intensely discussed political question within the Democratic Party. Bob Kerrey, the former Nebraska governor and former U.S. senator, who is now the president of the New School, told me, "I think it's ninety-nine-per-cent certain that Hillary will run, but that one per cent is where the world lives. She's got everything to run: the intellect, the money, the people, the national campaign—and she has the best political spouse in the business. If I were running for President, you can bet that I'd want Bill Clinton as my spouse—even if it meant a change in sexual orientation! He's good at everything. He'll get huge crowds wherever they send him, and, remember, a Presidential campaign gets ten requests for every one that you can do. The most important media you get in a Presidential campaign is the free media, and I've got to think he is worth two hundred million in free media."

Clinton is already, in effect, Advance Man in Chief. His recent trip to New Hampshire was an early foray into the race, and he is scheduled to speak at a range of high-profile events, including the Iowa Democratic Party's annual Jefferson Jackson Dinner, this fall.

"Bill Clinton helps her by being one of the most gifted strategists of our time," Mike McCurry, who was Clinton's press secretary from 1995 to 1998, said. "Paul Begala and James Carville were good in '92, but Clinton is a long shot better. But, just as she had to develop a story line as First Lady, he is going to have the same problem. He is delivering to us now a model of what he might have to do as First Spouse, as an emissary rebuilding America's reputation in the world, the premier overseas ambassador, the chief of public diplomacy."

Hillary Clinton said of her husband, "When he was President, he really tried against great odds to reach out on behalf of our country in a way that connected others around the world to us. But I think, clearly, the comparison with his successor only enhances the nostalgia that people feel for his Presidency."

Strategists for Senator Clinton see the positives in her husband, but they are increasingly aware that they have to be careful about putting the two onstage together. Both spoke at the marathon funeral services for Coretta Scott King, at the New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Georgia, earlier this year. Bill Clinton, who was called America's "first black President" by Toni Morrison in these pages, could not have had greater emotional and rhetorical command. Every gesture—from the apt quotation from the Book of Isaiah to the way he pointed to the coffin and reminded everyone that there was "a woman in there," not an icon but a mother, the wife of the greatest of all civil-rights leaders—spoke to a lifetime's experience in the pulpit. As the crowd cheered him, Clinton stepped aside for his wife, and although her speech was adequate, she was, by comparison, cool and mechanical, and the reception was merely polite.

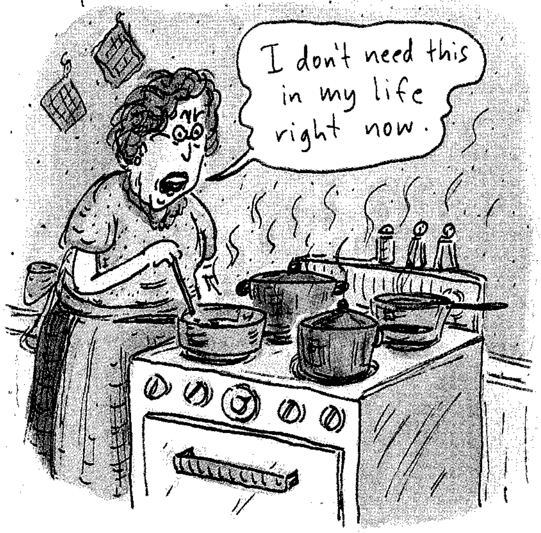
Clinton is used to playing the lead role, and now he cannot; his discipline as secondary player sometimes wanders. I was once at a dinner with both Clintons where he occasionally stared out the window during Hillary's speech. Before another dinner, where she was the

SKETCHBOOK BY ROZ CHAST

THE Apartment 5-J FILM FESTIVAL

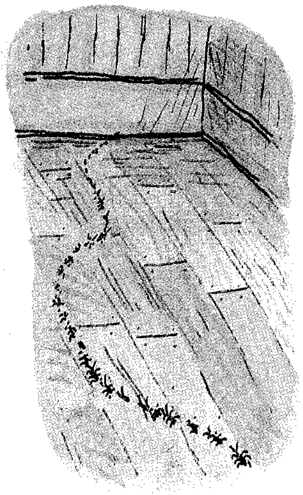
Mom Cooking

A touching five-minute documentary in which a mother prepares dinner for her family.


I don't need this in my life right now.

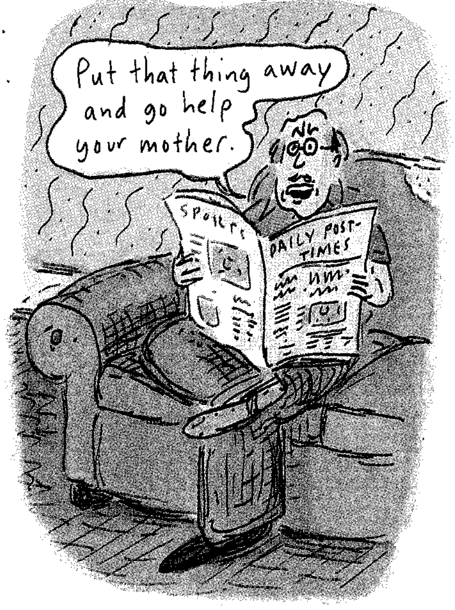
March of the Cockroaches

One minute in the life of this fascinating insect. Stunning cinematography.



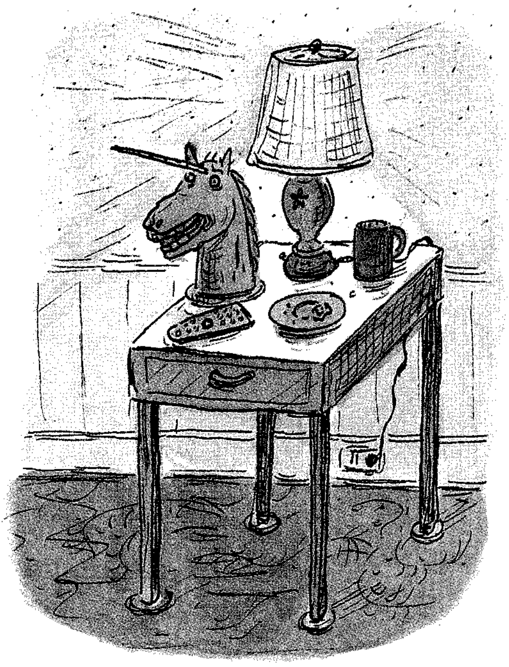
Words of Wisdom

A father is given ten minutes in which to explain his philosophy of life.


Put that thing away and go help your mother.
SPORTS
DAILY POST-TIMES

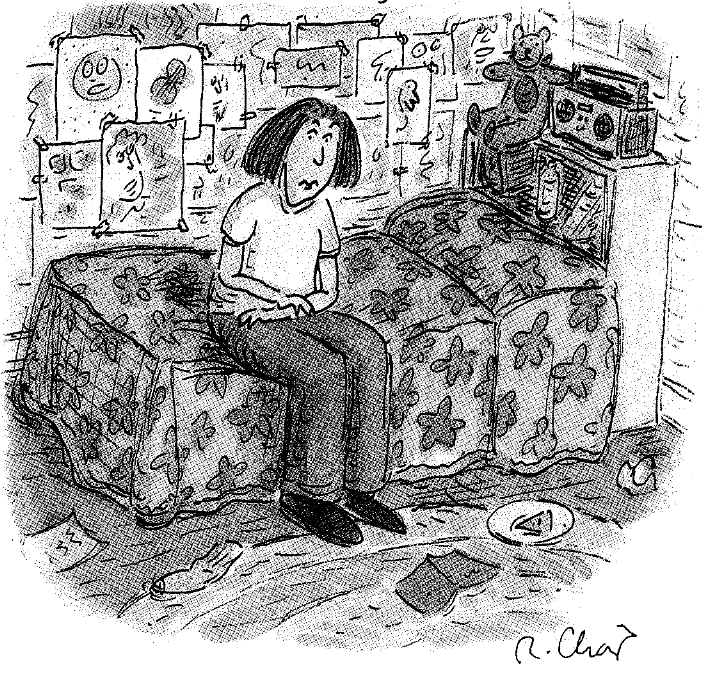
Shadows and Light

Fifteen-minute art-house film.



Would You Please BITE ME?

Cutting-edge autobiographical unspooler. Running time: eight minutes.



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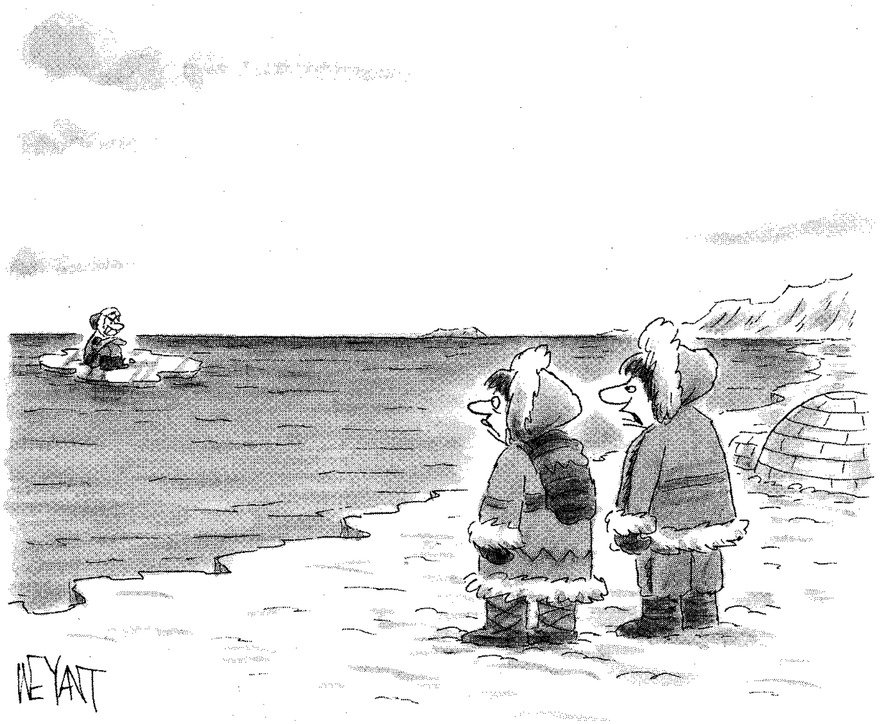

"It's your mother. She's floated back."

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guest of honor, he muttered to himself on the way in, "Don't talk too much—keep quiet."

I asked Clinton if he saw himself as a potentially negative factor in a race. "Only if people thought she wouldn't be her own person, and I don't think that will be a problem," he said. "I think, you know, sometimes, it's, like, unfair when—I'll give you an example. The last time that happened was at Coretta's funeral. I read about that, and I said, 'Hillary, if we both spoke at the Wellesley reunion, you'd probably get a better reception.' I said, 'You can't pay any attention to this.' I said, 'This is my life. I grew up in these churches. I knew more people by their first name in that church than at the end of my freshman year. This is my life. You don't have to be better at this than me. You got to be better than whoever.'"

Hillary Clinton told me, "I was amazed that anybody made any kind of big deal about that. I had a wonderful time being there. I didn't sense any invidious comparison whatsoever. He is a master at public communication. I don't know anyone who would argue with that."

Among Democratic Party operatives who speak wistfully of Bill Clinton as the Michael Jordan of politics, the Secretariat of spin, a concerted effort has begun to highlight Hillary's skills as opposed to his. "He is her most important adviser on policy and politics and much else—there is no secret about that," Melanne Verveer, who was Hillary's chief of staff in the White House, said. "Hillary has got skills and capabilities that are different from his. She is an exceptional listener. She is very smart—though he is, too. She is very pragmatic and disciplined. She is less patient with theoretical opportunities and more wants to get things done. She can be quiet and be happy working with her papers and books, where he is the Energizer Bunny and always has to have people around."

"She's better than him in some areas," the Democratic strategist James Carville said. "Her life is a testament to preparation. She is more disciplined than he is. We used to have to chase him off the rope line. And she is also attuned to the glory of the unspoken thought.

"I think if she runs no one will outprepare and outwork her," Carville continued. "What you discover in Presidential politics is that one of the big factors is fatigue—especially in the primaries. In the '92 campaign, all I remember is being fatigued, bone-tired, during Gennifer Flowers and the draft letter and all of that. You are like fighters who have to drag themselves out for the next round. But some people have that extra will to fight through the fatigue. The Clintons have that."

Elaine Kamarck, a Harvard professor who worked in the Clinton White House and then as a policy adviser to Gore in the 2000 campaign, said, "If there is anyone who knows how to fight the Republican slime machine, it's her. You can't imagine Hillary going through weeks of Swift Boat attacks and letting them go unanswered."

Hillary herself said, "Maybe because Bill and I have been through so many elections we know that Democrats have to fight back—that you can't assume people will see through the blizzard of negativity that is the hallmark of modern Republican campaigns. When Democrats don't fight back, I don't understand it. So that's been a disappointment to me, because of the results that, unfortunately, we've been stuck with now."

Just as Al Gore felt that he ended up paying more dearly for Bill Clinton's sins than Clinton did, some in the Clinton circle are worried that Hillary will suffer from the Lewinsky affair even if there is no repeat of it—that for some voters the reservations, and the gibes, will not go away.

Except on a few issues like trade, there is no ideological gap between the Clintons. "There never has been much space," Hillary Clinton said. "Bill and I have very similar world views and political views that we've developed over so many years that I don't think that's an issue."

Much more difficult to anticipate will be whether the electorate will want to relive the nineties and the drama of the Clinton marriage—the sanctimony, the pop analyses of their relationship on the evening news, the old infidelity and oral-sex jokes on Leno and Letterman. "Voters, many of them in red and purple states, will ask, 'Are we electing him again?' " Elaine Kamarck said.

"Hillary is dealing with a whole set of personal judgments based on her time during the Clinton Presidency," the former New Jersey senator Bill Bradley says. "The fact that she was elected senator is almost irrelevant to those judgments. It's very hard for her to establish herself in her own right. George W. Bush distinguished himself from his father by essentially closing him out, not talking to him much or meeting with him. That would be very hard for Hillary to do."

Leon Panetta, Clinton's former White House chief of staff, told me that the Clintons can employ his political skills and even their marriage as an asset, but only if they are disciplined.

"You want to make use of it, not be embarrassed by it, the way Al Gore was," he said. "Bill and Hillary Clinton have come to recognize that this is the nature of the relationship. Their marriage has survived because they have accommodated themselves to the strengths and weaknesses of each other.

"What they have to avoid in any way is trying to present images that in some ways distort their relationship—touchy-feely things, the holding-hands-on-the-beach kind of thing," Panetta continued. "Everybody understands the relationship—they have developed their own worlds—and they shouldn't try to be false. There is obviously a genuine feeling of love between them that goes back a long way. The one thing they can't do is for both of them to get into a mode where they decide there is a certain part of the world that is absolutely against them. That tends to eat at their guts and distorts their ability to do the right thing. That's not to say it isn't real, the enemies, but, if they are going to run, there's going to be all kinds of shit, and they are going to have to rise above it."

On May 23rd, the *Times* published a front-page article that was one of the stranger specimens of journalism in the past year. After weeks of investigation, "interviews with some 50 people," and "a review of their respective activities," the political reporter Patrick Healy gravely concluded that although "the dynamics of a couple's marriage are hard to gauge from outside," the Clintons have "built largely separate lives."

Healy wrote, "Mr. Clinton is rarely without company in public, yet the company he keeps rarely includes his wife." He is the firefly, she the drudge. He is "zipping around" at night with his "bachelor buddy" Ronald Burkle, or "hitting parties and fund-raisers" in Manhattan, while she is "yoked" to her work. The *Times* went on to say that since the start of 2005 the Clintons "have been together about 14 days a month on average, according to aides who reviewed the couple's schedules." In addition, "out of the last 73 weekends, they spent 51 together."

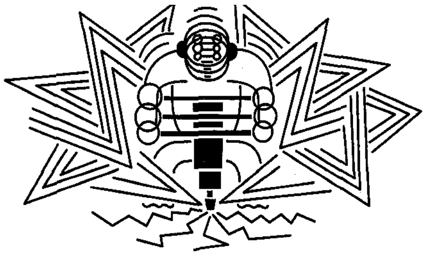
Unlike a tabloid exposé, the *Times* article did not openly explore every rumor about Bill Clinton's social life since leaving office. And yet the unmistakable inference was that in the post-Lewinsky era it is no longer just the right-wing noise machine that will be on the Clinton marriage beat if Hillary runs. One former Clinton aide, the ABC newscaster George Stephanopoulos, told me, "The piece said, 'We are watching this. People are talking about it. Fair warning.'"

Hillary Clinton insisted that such attention didn't bother her. "I'm just not going to give up a lot of psychic energy worrying about what other people worry about," she told me. "I'm endlessly fascinated by people's fascination with us, but that's not something I'm going to spend much time on."

Republican operatives make no secret of the fact that they are thinking hard about how to frame a campaign against Hillary Clinton. "They will basically try to tie the two of them together," Frank Luntz, a Republican media consultant, told me. "And, among Republicans, if you didn't like the original, you'll hate the new version.

"They will viscerally hate her, because she's smart, because she's ideological, and because they are generally afraid of her world view," he went on. "With Bill Clinton, you could negotiate with him. The feeling is, you can't move her. He's warm, she's cold; he was a politician, she's a theoretician. This is how people feel—and perception is reality."

However, Luntz said that he would be cautious about making a campaign issue of Clinton's past infidelities; only a return to bad behavior would matter.



"The only people who care are people who really hate them, the people who got burned by them—conservative Republicans," Luntz said. "But if it comes back—if he is an idiot and they start taking pictures again—it will cause her a world of problems. You won't want to cover it, but the *News* and the *Post* would love it. Some British tab will grab it, and then it's open season."

When I brought up the subject of the *Times* piece to Clinton later, at his office in Harlem, he laughed and said, "How weird was that?"

Then he narrowed his eyes to slits. "It didn't bother me as much as it did a lot of people last time," he said. "But I just want to—That's their choice. Except this time, with all the problems this country has, if the New York *Times* really wants to take the place of the *Enquirer*, and the *Globe* and the *Star*, you know there are alternative means of communication this year. And I don't know how long people in the press think they can do that to one party, instead of both, by themselves. I think this is nuts, myself. I've never engaged in it, and I never will.

"First of all," he continued, "I'm about to be sixty years old and I damn near died. And I'm worried about how many lives I can save before I do die. So, for me, I'm just blowing it off. I read the letters to the editor, in the New York *Times*, and I was shocked at the number of people who said, 'You know, I didn't vote for that guy, and I didn't vote for her, but have you lost your mind?' That's sort of what I thought. And I think it got pretty well the response that it deserved. But ask me if I'm worried about all of that? Not a bit."

But was he prepared to go through it again? I asked.

"You know, when I look at how old I am, and see my gray hair in the mirror, I can't imagine that anybody's interested in my life anymore," Clinton said. "But, for one thing, I literally have no idea yet whether my wife will want to run for President. That's the first thing. And I know nobody believes that, but I do not believe she has made that decision. And I believe if she had firmly decided to do that, I would know. I believe that.

"Secondly, I said this a thousand times, I'll say it again. I don't know if she can win if she runs. I do believe that if she were elected she would be magnificent. She is an exceptionally able person who has been subject to a level of scrutiny and criticism that I think is almost amazing, and has not gotten half the credit she deserves for what she's done. But she has risen against all the odds. And like me she believes in working with Republicans when she can, and disagreeing with them when she needs to.

"Third, if she decides that's what she wants to do, I'll be for it, and I'll work for it, and I know what the deal is. You've got to understand—I have a whole different attitude to life now. Every day I get up is a gift. I could have died two years ago. And I'm in great health, I think. I feel good, I think I'm out there saving lives, I think I'm helping change the world, and it's just part of the cost of doing business. I mean, if you want to run for President in this day and age, and you don't want to be criticized, that's like Yao Ming saying, 'Why are they fouling me? I'm just a seven-foot-five-inch basketball player! Why are they being so mean to me?' We know what the deal is—at least we know for the last thirty years what's happened to the course of American politics. I wouldn't be surprised, I must say, if those little letters to the editor of the New York *Times* weren't indicative of a huge bipartisan urge to get away from all that, because I think people believe the country's if not in trouble then in crisis, that we've got a lot of big decisions to make about where we're going. But I'm completely relaxed about it. Whatever happens, fine with me."

At times, Clinton's hopscotch through Africa seemed like one of those vaudeville routines in which a storyteller steps to the lip of the stage to recount his trip around the world as a painted backdrop scrolls behind him: Big Ben, the Kremlin, the Taj Mahal…

The tarmac of Kamuzu Airport, in Lilongwe, Malawi, was prepared for the arrival of its distinguished visitor. A red runner carpet stretched a hundred yards across the pavement. Tribal dancers performed in leopard skins and cut-off jeans; the tribal singers wore long dresses emblazoned with multiple portraits of ears of maize and of the President, Bingu wa Mutharika.

Victoria Roberts

"I'm off to the gym, where my private self and my public self converge."

Just before Clinton's plane landed, a motorcade pulled up to the red carpet and President Bingu, tall and mountainous, emerged from a Toyota Land Cruiser. Bingu's loafers went unsullied by uncarpeted ground, and a uniformed general held an open umbrella over his head to shade him from the sun as he walked toward the plane.

The Malawi stop lasted just a few hours; its purpose was the signing of a memorandum of understanding about a new Clinton development project backed by a Scottish sporting-goods magnate, Sir Tom Hunter. "This will seem like a political pageant," Ira Magaziner said, "but we'll ride off of his few hours in Malawi for years. There will be pictures of him in government offices, people will have memories of meeting him, and it will pay off politically."

The roads leading back to the Lilongwe airport were lined with men, nearly all of them young and out of work. Clinton told his driver to pull over, and he allowed the crowds to converge upon him. And there he was, the ex-President, his corona of white hair and his pink delighted face bobbing above the crowd, hundreds of people trying to touch his outstretched hands. I'm not sure I've ever seen a man happier than Clinton at that moment. The official videographer took it all in.

We landed at the airport in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, after dark. This was Clinton's fourth visit in eight years. The first was in 1998, when, in the middle of an extended Presidential tour of Africa, he came to the airport to apologize for American inaction during the hundred-day genocide, four years earlier. "It may seem strange to you here, especially the many of you who lost members of your family," he said that day, "but all over the world there were people like me sitting in offices, day after day after day, who did not fully appreciate the depth and speed with which you were being engulfed by this unimaginable terror."

Around eight hundred thousand people, mainly Tutsis, were slaughtered in 1994. Today, more than a hundred and fifty thousand people in Rwanda are infected with H.I.V. Clinton may be de-

"The employer-employee bond is sometimes difficult to sever."

fensive and self-forgiving about his Administration's record on AIDS, but he does admit to a deep sense of guilt about, and duty to, Rwanda.

Some of the travelling party went from the airport to the genocide museum. In the front yard of the museum are mass graves holding the remains of more than a quarter of a million Rwandans. Inside, the display cases hold hundreds of skulls and femurs. Clinton, who had been to the museum before, went to the "Presidential suite" at the Intercontinental Hotel to relax.

Later that night, Clinton invited everyone travelling with him, along with the heads of the foundation staff in Rwanda, up to his suite for dinner. At first, he talked about his meetings with some of the survivors of the genocide, but pretty quickly he seemed eager to talk about more distant subjects: wind and solar power, the frustrations with the Gore campaign in 2000 ("But he won, that's crystal clear to me"), and Barack Obama, who he thinks has the intelligence and the toughness necessary to be President but has to be careful about running too soon—"like John Edwards."

Later, when I asked Clinton about Rwanda, he said that the calamity in Somalia and the crisis in the Balkans had been distractions but that his inaction in Rwanda was the worst foreign-policy mistake of his Administration.

"Whatever happened, I have to take responsibility for it," he said. "We never even had a staff meeting on it. But I don't blame anybody that works for me. That was my fault. I should have been alert and alive to it. And that's why I went there and apologized in '98. I've always been surprised at how much they wanted me to come back, accepting my help on their holocaust memorial. Every time I ask, they say, 'You know, we did this to ourselves, you didn't make us do it—I wish you'd come.' And then they always say, 'Besides, you were the only one who ever apologized. Nobody else even said they were sorry.' So all I can do is—I just have to face it. It was just one of those things that happen. It is inexplicable to me looking back, but when we lived it forward, in the aftermath of Somalia, trying to get the support from a fairly isolationist Congress at the time—including some elements in both parties—to get into Bosnia, where I felt we had an overwhelming national interest and a moral imperative, we just blew it. I blew it. I just, I feel *terrible* about it, and all I can ever do is tell them the truth, and not try to sugarcoat it, and try to make it up to them."

In the morning, we flew east in Russian helicopters to the compound of the Rwandan President, Paul Kagame. The bush was lush and green, and, from the air, we saw only the occasional village. After half an hour, we landed in a field of high grass a few hundred yards up a hill from Lake Muhazi. A bus met us and took us through the gates of the Kagame compound. The property, with corrals and guesthouses, seemed like an African version of Southfork.

Kagame, who spent much of his career as a guerrilla fighter in Uganda and Rwanda, came out to greet Clinton wearing a Ralph Lauren shirt and a pair of Dockers. He led Clinton around the property to see his guard dogs and then to a corral where he kept some cattle with long, undulating horns.

"They are called *inyambo*," Kagame said.

Clinton smiled and then let his jaw drop a little. "A-*ma*-zing," he said.

The President of Rwanda beamed. "These cows provide only low-fat milk," he said.

"No fat?" the recent cardiac patient said appreciatively.

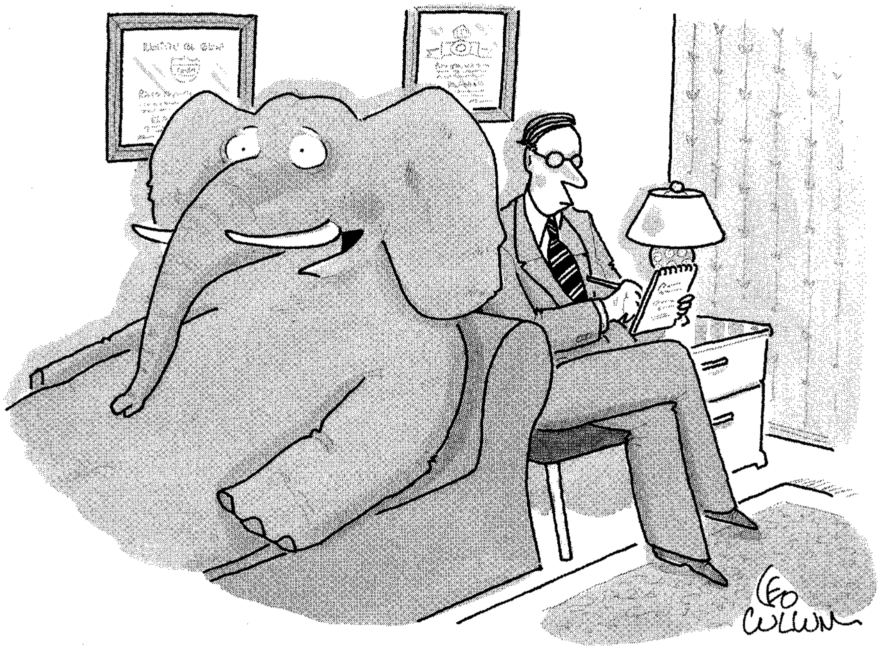
"Drink as much as you want," Kagame said. "No problem."

As we walked away, Ira Magaziner, ever the stickler, said quietly, "Actually, with the African diet it would be better to have high-fat milk."

Kagame's staff had erected a huge tent in the back yard, and there were platters of eggs, toast, and fruit for breakfast.

I sat next to a tall, slender woman dressed in a formal blue pants suit. We chatted politely for a while about the crested cranes and other species that roamed the property, and it emerged that she was Lieutenant Colonel Rose Kabuye, the chief of protocol and the highest-ranking woman in the Rwandan Army. Kabuye had trained with Kagame's forces in Uganda and took part in the siege of Kigali in 1994; when the killing stopped, she became mayor of the city. She used to carry a Kalashnikov. Now she had a butterfly pin clipped to her lapel.

"I think we like Clinton because he was the only world leader who came here and said how sorry he was—and that meant a lot to Africans," she said. "I wish



"I'm right there in the room, and no one even acknowledges me."

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others, including American Presidents, would come, too."

After breakfast, we boarded the helicopters, Kagame in tow, and headed for a hospital in the village of Rwinkwavu. The hospital used to serve a nearby tin mine run by Belgian colonials; now it is run by Paul Farmer, an infectious-disease specialist who first made his mark in Haiti and later in Russia, South America, and Africa. Farmer, who began Partners in Health, is hoping that with financing from the Clinton Foundation, the Rwandan government, and other sources he will be able to set up similar hospitals around the country. Farmer led Clinton around the hospital, which treated forty thousand patients last year; it is a catchment point for much of eastern Rwanda, the poorest sector of the country. Mothers and children rested together in narrow beds and watched, wide-eyed, as Clinton strode through the ward. In a hallway, a few patients lined up to tell Clinton of their experiences. Speaking Kinyarwanda, a woman named Solange described how she and her husband, both suffering from AIDS symptoms, sold their land in order to get treatment. She was brought to the hospital in a coma in February, and her husband died soon afterward. She began drug treatments in May. Her recovery, she said, "thanks to God," has been "unbelievable."

"How do you feel now?" Kagame asked her.

"I feel *strong*," she said. Then she sang a traditional Rwandan song: "If it weren't for the power of the Almighty, I would die." When she stopped singing, she began to cry as she thanked Clinton and the doctors for helping to save her life.

Before Kagame boarded his helicopter to return home, he explained why he had long ago made his peace with his visitor. "I accept Bill Clinton's apologies. Looking back, he wished he had done more than he did, and that comes from a sincere person."

Paul Farmer stood nearby, listening, knowing that soon the tour would end and he would go back to work. He is forty-six and, thanks to the reputation for selflessness he has built up in the field, he is routinely referred to as a saint—and he has the physique to prove it. "I'm the skinny one," Paul Farmer said to me, and added, gesturing to another, distinctly less skinny American, "Meet my brother."

Most of the doctors and notables at the clinic wore name tags announcing their bureaucratic affiliations in the world of public health. Jeff Farmer's read "Global Ass-Whuppin' Initiative." The penny dropped. Jeff Farmer, a professional wrestler, had been Lightning in the tag team of Thunder & Lightning. Jeff Farmer's signature hold remains the Scorpion Death Lock.

Bill Clinton generally maintains the tradition of former Presidents respecting their successors, but the mixture of motives that pull at him is unique. Having stepped off the electoral merry-go-round for good, an ex-President is theoretically free to say what he *really* thinks. But what about an ex-President whose spouse is a senator contemplating a run for even higher office? Hillary Clinton's ambitions stoke Bill Clinton's instinct to be combative on her behalf; by the same token, he must try not to say things that would force her to do a lot of explaining. "My sense is that he trims his sails on an awful lot of issues because of what it might do in terms of Hillary's career," one insider close to both Clintons said.

As for Clinton's attitude to his White House successor, his role as the Democratic Party's (and his wife's) biggest gun pushes him in one direction, while his role as a non-partisan, above-the-fray doer of global good deeds pushes him in another. A further complication is that his successor's father is the predecessor whose bid for reëlection he quashed in 1992. If the antecedents are confusing, the emotions are, too. So friendly has Clinton grown with his old opponent George H. W. Bush—they have raised more than a hundred million dollars together, to help the victims of the Asian tsunami in 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005—that one member of the Clintons' circle worries that "the Bush people worked hard to co-opt him," keeping Clinton quiet, or at least polite, by keeping him close.

Many of Clinton's sentences begin "When I was President" or "During our Administration," but he does not often begin with, for instance, "If I were President." And yet when I asked him once whether he ever wished he were unhindered by the Twenty-second Amendment, he hesitated.

"9/11—I wish that I'd been there," Clinton said. He had been in Australia that day, to give a speech. "I wish I'd been there beforehand, you know, when the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. finally said we agree that bin Laden did the Cole. We could have gone after Afghanistan. And in the aftermath I'd have liked to have been there."

Clinton remains sensitive to accusations that he was too hesitant or distracted in the pursuit of Osama bin Laden—recently, he attacked an ABC docudrama for suggesting that his Administration, given the chance, had failed to fire on bin Laden—and so I asked him what he would have done in Bush's place.

"I would have gone into Afghanistan, as quick as I could, just as President Bush did," he said, "and I would have demanded that Saddam open himself up to inspections, because U.N. records indicated that there were unaccounted-for chemical and biological materials. I personally never saw any intelligence on the Al Qaeda connection or the nuclear issue, except that he had some people in labs fooling around with it."

Once he got going, Clinton laid out a critique of the Bush Administration, though his was not remotely as harsh as the one Al Gore has provided in the past two years. Tax cuts for the top one per cent of the income scale were "ridiculous." Working people were getting "stiffed."

"It just makes me mad," he said. "I just wish I were there—I wish I were there trying to articulate the alternative vision."

When opponents of the Bush Administration express nostalgia for the Clinton era, it sometimes has less to do with policy than with the stark contrast between the two men as public speakers, as intelligences. Even Clinton's critics who feel that he squandered his promise never speculate, as Bush's critics often do, that he is stupid. When I asked Clinton if he thought intellect was an essential part of being President, he proceeded carefully.

"I think it's important to be curious, I think it's important to ask questions, I think it's important to be secure so that you like being around people that know more about every subject than you do and still in the end you trust your own judgment once you hear them out," he said. "So I think intellect is a good thing, unless it paralyzes your ability to make decisions because you see too much complexity. Presidents need to have what I would call a synthesizing intelligence.

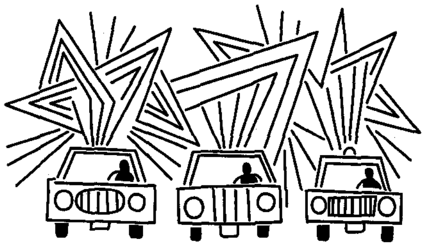
"I keep reading that Bush is incurious, but when he talks to me he asks a lot of questions," Clinton went on. "So I can't give him a bad grade on curiosity. I think both he and his father, because they have peculiar speech patterns, have been underestimated in terms of their intellectual capacity. You know, the way they speak and all, it could be, it could just relate to the way the synapses work in their brains.

"I've never been worried about his intellect so much as his ideological bent. I think he believed—and perhaps correctly—that his father was defeated in '92 because he lost the right. And he made up his mind that he'd never lose it. Kind of like George Wallace did when he was beaten for governor.

"I also think that he was genuinely more conservative on questions like concentrations of wealth and power, weakening of environmental and health regulations—things of that kind—than any President we've had in a very, very long time. Even more conservative than Reagan, probably, and way to the right of his father and Nixon and Eisenhower. But the thing that bothers me about having an ideology as opposed to a philosophy is that, if you have an ideology, then the outcome is dictated before the facts are in, before the arguments are heard. And that, I think, can cause problems."

Clinton said that Bush, despite employing the slogan "compassionate conservatism," never hid his radical-right agenda. "He said, 'Vote for me, and I'll give you judges like Clarence Thomas and Antonin Scalia,' and that's exactly what he did."

Clinton frequently says that he has "a theory of the case"—an overview of how the Republican Party, starting in the nineteen-seventies, moved increasingly to the right. Like many other political analysts, he believes that the Republicans were able to capitalize on the reaction to the counterculture of the nineteen-sixties and the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision, in 1973. "Starting in the late seventies, they really developed the ability to demonize us, independent of the fact that we were for civil rights and against the Vietnam War," Clinton said.



He spoke with a professional's admiration of Reagan's calm and his talent as a political performer, but said that the Reagan campaign employed "mad dogs" in 1980. "They called our crowd everything but a blue goose," Clinton said. "I remember looking at these people in the voting line and thinking, Oh my God, it's going to be a long night, because they were just glassy-eyed. They were there like somebody had fed them some sort of a controlled substance."

In the early nineties, Clinton theorized, "with the increasing diversity in America, and the increasing urbanization, and the suburbs becoming more communitarian and less isolationist, our base slowly moved up to theirs. So, by the time Al Gore ran, we had equal bases.

"What that means is," he continued, "they can run somebody convicted of armed robbery and, barring a national catastrophe like 9/11, we couldn't win by more than fifty-five to forty-five, and neither could they, under the present circumstances."

Clinton is clearly anticipating a widening attack on Hillary's agonized Senate vote on Iraq in October, 2002. Her speech before the vote denounced preëmptive war and asked for greater attempts at diplomacy and weapons inspections in Iraq, but in the end she remains vulnerable to the ever-increasing number of people furious about the war. And so Clinton, in effect, provides her defense. "It would really be crazy," he said, "if the anti-war element of our Party thought that the most important thing to do was to beat up on the Democrats, and gave the Republicans a free ride."

Clinton had told me that the Bush Administration's plan for post-invasion Iraq "was the sort of thing two students of international relations could have thrown together in forty-five minutes. They were arrogant. They thought it would be easy and they thought there would be no terrorism, that everyone would be on their side." In more formal interviews, the rambling answer he gave to my questions about what the United States had to do next in Iraq was, like some of Hillary's speeches, long on complexity and alternatives, short on direction, and unlikely to satisfy voters demanding a renunciation of the war and a rapid withdrawal of American forces.

"I think first of all you've got to remind people that we didn't get into this mess overnight—and we're not going to get out of it overnight, that we might decide that it's a lost cause and we just have to withdraw in an expeditious fashion," he said. "But that whether you were for or against the original action, it would be better if it did not end in calamity and chaos, mass killing within Iraq, more terrorist bases there. And I think you have to say that this is a national-security issue—and I say that because I don't think we should have done it until after the U.N. inspections were over, until we had secured Afghanistan, and we had a consensus in the world community. I never thought Saddam presented any kind of a terrorist threat. But once you break these eggs you've got to kind of make an omelette. And we've just got to be straight about that. And, if it is obvious that there is nothing positive that can come from our committed involvement there, then we have to say we'd be prepared to say we'll come home—but we're not there yet. Seventy per cent of those people did vote. They voted to set up this government. And most of them, if left to their own devices without the people with the guns in the middle, would find some way to make some sort of decent go of it."

Clinton had a long day ahead of him in Addis Ababa. In the morning, in a Soviet-style government building that looked as if it had been airlifted from downtown Novosibirsk, he met with Meles Zenawi, the Ethiopian Prime Minister. Then it was on to an AIDS clinic and a speech at the African Union.

In every city where he had time, Clinton called for a few hours of cultural expeditions or shopping—a break. In Durban, he'd picked up an eight-foot-tall wooden giraffe for Hillary ("She *loves* giraffes!") and at a crafts store in Addis he bought loads of gifts for friends and staff, including a gigantic silver Coptic crucifix. His aide Justin Cooper left the store with his arms so full he looked as if he had looted it. Then, at Clinton's command, we visited the National Museum, which houses the bones of "Lucy," a hominid who lived more than three million years ago. The museum was dingy and underfunded, but the guides were thrilled to open the place to Clinton, even though it was their day off. As he walked past the exhibits, Clinton listened a little and talked a lot. He talked about the giant pigs, the razorbacks, that roam his home state. And as he walked past some of the display cases he started talking about the wonders of the bonobo apes.

"They have the most incredibly developed social sense," he said. "When one of them makes a kill, they share the food, unlike all the other apes." And then, Clinton said, with a laugh, "they fall down to the ground and have group sex! It's a way of relieving aggression!" Such behavior, he said, "would drive the Christian right crazy!"

There wasn't much anyone could add to that, so we walked past the bones and the maps in silence for a while.

Then Clinton said, "Hillary used to read *Archaeology* and she told me all about this stuff."

That night, Clinton invited the travelling party to Castelli's, an Italian restaurant on Mahatma Gandhi Street, near the Mercato, the market area. The original owner had come to Ethiopia in the thirties with Mussolini's occupying army and stayed behind; the family members who run it now speak fluent Amharic. There were plates of marinated eggplant and zucchini, prosciutto di Parma shipped to Djibouti from Italy and driven to Addis; there were two kinds of spaghetti, two of ravioli; there was roast chicken. On the wall were pictures of Jimmy Carter, Brad Pitt, and Angelina Jolie with the owners.

I sat across from Clinton. There were bags under his eyes, and yet he seemed in a good mood, eating, joking around. (He barely touches wine or other alcohol.) And then, without a question or a prodding comment, Clinton started to talk about Whitewater, about Kenneth Starr, about how allowing the appointment of a special prosecutor had been "the worst decision" of his Presidency. He talked about old enemies in Arkansas, about the Resolution Trust Corporation, about Gennifer Flowers, about Susan Schmidt, of the Washington *Post* ("a Xerox machine for Ken Starr"). This went on for twenty minutes, at least. A few times, when he started pointing across the table, when his carotid artery seemed to inflate like a jammed garden hose, you could see just how deeply he still feels the attacks of the late nineties.

Someone asked him if he thought it would be unbearable to go through all of it again, as he inevitably would if Hillary ran for President in 2008.

"I don't care," he said, "because we know we did nothing wrong."

Later, Clinton's aides expressed little surprise at his outburst. John Podesta, who had been at the dinner, said, "He can bring it up and be pissed off all over again, but he really has moved on. He reminds himself of what Mandela told him at Robben Island. Clinton asked, 'How did you forgive your jailers?' And Mandela said, 'When I walked out of the gate I knew that if I continued to hate these people I was still in prison.' Clinton believes it, but he has to keep reminding himself. That story is a little bit of a prayer."

Despite Clinton's declarations of inner peace, his "prayer" does not always keep the furies, the old resentments, at bay. "The method he uses to live with himself is to make a clear and precise argument that this was something that others had done to him and not that he had done to himself," Leon Panetta said. "Because of his brainpower, he can create a logic for anything. But deep down he would be such a good person if he could just accept the fact that he screwed up and made mistakes, and move on."

Rahm Emanuel told me that this was too harsh an interpretation, that the attack on the Clintons in the nineties was so severe and baseless, in his view, that a moment of anger over dinner was nothing. He mentioned a recent report in the Chicago *Tribune* which revealed that the Speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert, began his career in Congress with a net worth of three hundred thousand dollars and now has assets of six million, owing largely to an almost fantastical increase in the value of land near a highway project that he helped push through Congress. "The Speaker came in with three hundred thousand dollars and now has six million in real estate and no one asks a question? Your question is 'Why is Clinton so angry?' My question is 'Why are you so stupid?'"

The last day of the trip was, when time zones were taken into account, two days: Addis Ababa to Abuja, Nigeria, to Monrovia, Liberia, to the Azores (for refuelling), to the Westchester County Airport, in White Plains, New York.

In the morning, when we arrived in Abuja—the Brasília of Nigeria, an artificial capital city distant from the poverty of Lagos and the villages—Clinton was worn out and in a foul mood. As we were getting ready to leave the plane, he accosted Eric Nonacs, an intelligent and extremely efficient foreign-policy aide, and asked him for some detailed information on the Millennium Debt Relief Initiative.

Nonacs did not have everything at hand.

Clinton scowled. "How hard can it be, Eric?" he said, in the unloveliest of tones.

Clinton's aides are constantly half-listening to the world and pecking away at their BlackBerrys; normally, they could quickly summon any information they needed from the home office in New York or from the Internet, but they were out of electronic range.

Clinton was scheduled to meet with Olusegun Obasanjo, the Nigerian President, in an hour, and it was a long ride into town. He would not let his displeasure go. He brooded and shoved papers into his portfolio.

Nonacs kept silent, knowing better than to explain further. The other aides wore pinched expressions, like professionals at a funeral home. "I mean, how can we not know this?" Clinton groused.

Because the Nigerians would not allow more than one vehicle on the grounds of the Presidential complex, Clinton's entire contingent jammed into one white van, with Clinton in the second row of seats. He worked moodily on some papers. Abuja was hot and steamy that morning, but, unaccountably, with the windows closed, Clinton absently reached up and, with a flick, shut off the air-conditioning. Very soon the air inside the van was stale and overheated. Nonacs didn't realize who had shut off the air and said, "Hey, isn't there any air in here? What's the air-conditioning situ—" He was in mid-syllable when Magaziner and Podesta turned to him, their eyes wide. Nonacs, thankfully, was quick to understand. We rode another half hour until finally someone intuited that Clinton's mood had passed and a brave soul turned on the A.C. Clinton did not notice. The weather had changed.

Obasanjo, wearing a spectacularly iridescent dashiki and carrying a carved walking stick, received Clinton and his aides in a reception room lined with marble and glass. The two men have developed a close relationship, but evidently this session was not the highlight of their years together, for when Clinton got back in the van he said with frustration, "That was quite a meeting, wasn't it?"

We headed for a village nearby where Clinton thought that he could kill half an hour looking at the local crafts. He was buoyant again. At one of the gift stores, he lectured the guide, and me, on how, when he was in Kazakhstan, he bought a bow and arrow made of a composite: "The first composite was made a thousand years ago by the Mongols. Did you know that? It's *fascinating*."

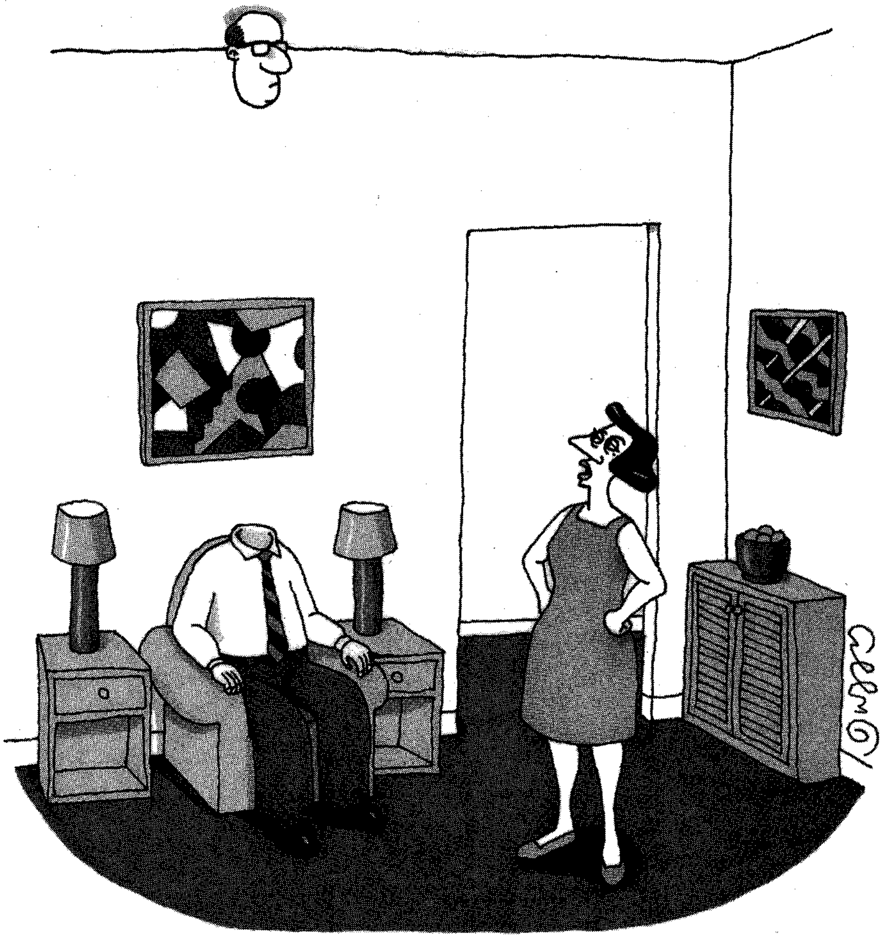
On the plane home, Clinton went in for some recreational multitasking, eating, gossiping, playing endless hands of Oh Hell. There were fifteen hours left to fly and a ten-minute drive from the airport before he'd be in Chappaqua. When we landed in White Plains, a dozen black cars were there to meet us.

Clinton seemed reluctant to rush home; he was buzzy with a sense of accomplishment. On the last leg of the flight, he'd availed himself of the plane's bedroom, with its double bed and shower, but he said, "I had a hard time sleeping, I was just so excited about the trip!"

It was a steam bath on the tarmac, worse than Ethiopia or Liberia. Justin Cooper and others unloaded Clinton's bags and the gifts he'd bought and the gifts he'd been given by the various African leaders. I'm fairly sure Stanley came home from the Congo with fewer trinkets than Clinton did from this trip. Justin came down the steps lugging Clinton's golf clubs, the Presidential seal on the side of the bag. Finally, someone gently laid the wooden giraffe in the Secret Service S.U.V.

"Mr. President, that's some giraffe," I said. "It must be seven, eight feet tall."

"Well, Hillary *loves* giraffes," Clinton said. "But I think when I bring this one home it's either gonna be 'I love it' or one of those deals like, 'Hey, have you met my first husband, Bill?' " ♦



"Don't you dare float your head to the ceiling while I'm talking to you!"

FICTION

SOMETHING THAT NEEDS NOTHING

BY MIRANDA JULY

In an ideal world, we would have been orphans. We felt like orphans and we felt deserving of the pity that orphans get, but, embarrassingly enough, we had parents. I even had two. They would never have let me go, so I didn't say goodbye; I packed a little bag and left a note. On the way to Pip's house, I cashed my graduation checks. Then I sat on her porch and pretended that I was twelve or fifteen or even sixteen. At all those ages I had dreamed of this day; I had even imagined sitting on this porch, waiting for Pip for the last time. She had the opposite problem: her mom *would* let her go. Her mom had gigantic swollen legs that were a symptom of something much worse and she was heavily medicated with marijuana at all times.

We were anxious to begin our life as people who had no people. And it was easy to find an apartment when we got to Portland, because we had no standards; we stood in our tiny new studio and admired *our* door, *our* rotting carpet, *our* cockroach infestation. We decorated with paper streamers and Chinese lanterns and we shared the ancient bed that came with the apartment. This was tremendously exciting for one of us. One of us had always been in love with the other. One of us lived in a perpetual state of longing. But we'd met when we were children and we seemed destined to sleep together like children, or like an old couple who got married before the sexual revolution and are too embarrassed to learn the new way.

Next we focussed on employment; we went hardly anywhere without joyfully filling out an application. But once we were hired—as furniture sanders—we could not believe that this was really what people did all day. Everything that we had always thought of as "The World" was actually the result of someone's job. Each line on the sidewalk, each saltine. Everyone had a rotting carpet and a door to pay for. Aghast, we quit. There had to be a more dignified way to live. We needed time to consider ourselves, to come up with a theory about who we were and set it to music.

With this goal in mind, Pip came up with a new plan. We went at it with determination—three weeks in a row we wrote and rewrote and resubmitted an ad to the local paper. Finally, the *Portland Weekly* accepted it; it no longer sounded like blatant prostitution, and yet, to the right reader, it could have meant nothing else. We were targeting wealthy women who loved women. Did such a thing exist? We would also consider a woman of average means who had saved up her money.

The ad ran for a month and our voice-mail box overflowed with interest. Every day we listened to hundreds of messages from men, waiting for that one special lady who would pay our rent. She was slow to appear. Perhaps she did not even read this section of the paper. We became agitated. We knew that this was the only way we could make money without compromising ourselves. Could we pay Mr. Hilderbrand, the landlord, in food stamps? We could not. Was he interested in the old camera that Pip's grandmother had loaned her? He was not. He wanted to be paid in the traditional way. Pip grimly began to troll through the messages for a man who sounded gentle. I watched her boyish face as she listened and I realized that she was terrified. He would have to be a withered man, a man who really just wanted to see us jump around in our underwear. Suddenly, Pip grinned and wrote down a number. The woman's name was Leslie.

The bus dropped us off at the top of the gravel driveway that Leslie had described on the phone. We'd told her that our names were Astrid and Tallulah, and we hoped that Leslie was a pseudonym, too. We wanted her to be wearing a smoking jacket or a boa. We hoped that she was familiar with the work of Anaïs Nin. We hoped that she was not the way she'd sounded on the phone. Not poor, not old, not just willing to pay for the company of anyone who would come all the way out to Nehalem, population 210.

Pip and I walked down the gravel path toward a small brown house. A woman stepped onto the porch. Her age was difficult to determine from our vantage point—a point in our lives when we could not bring older bodies into focus. She was perhaps the age of my mother's older sister, Aunt Lynn. And, like Aunt Lynn, she wore leggings, royal-blue leggings, and an oversized button-down shirt with some kind of appliqué on it. My mind ballooned with nervous fear, and I looked at Pip, and for a split second I felt as though she were nobody special in the larger scheme of my life. She was just some girl who had tied my leg to hers before jumping off the bridge. Then I blinked and I was in love with her again.

Leslie waved and we waved. We waved until we were close enough to say hi and then we said hi. She said, "Come on in," and we went in. Pip asked for the money right away, which was something we'd decided to do beforehand. It is always terrible to have to ask for anything. We wished we were something that needed nothing, like paint. But even paint needs repainting. She told us that we were younger than she'd expected. We sat on an old vinyl couch, and she left the room. It was an awful room, with magazines piled everywhere and furniture that looked as if it had come from a motel. We didn't look at each other or at anything that was reflective. I stared at my knees.

For a long time we didn't know where she was, and then slowly I could feel that she was standing right behind us. I realized this just before she pulled her fingernails through my hair. I hadn't been able to imagine her as the sexual type, but now I realized that I didn't know anything. It had begun, which meant that every second brought us closer to the end. I told myself that long nails meant wealth; the idea of wealth always calmed me down. My head relaxed and I did that exercise where you imagine that you are turning into honey. My mind slowed to a rate that would not have been considered functional for any other job. I was alive only one out of every four seconds; I registered only fifteen minutes out of the hour. I saw that she was standing before us in a slip and that it was not really clean and I died. I saw that Pip was taking off her shoes and I died. I saw that I was squeezing a nipple and I died.

On the long ride home neither of us said anything. We were kites flying in opposite directions attached to strings held by one hand. The money we'd just made was also in that hand. Pip stopped to get a bag of chips on the way home from the bus station and then we had $1.99 less than our rent. It

STEFANIE SCHNEIDER, "RADHA PINK (29 PALMS, CA)" (1999)

seemed obvious now that we should have charged more. Pip put the money in an envelope and wrote Mr. Hilderbrand's name on it. Then we stood there, apart, bruised, and smelling like Leslie.

We turned away from each other and set about tightening all the tiny ropes of our misery. I decided to take a bath. Just as I was stepping into the tub I heard the front door close and I froze mid-step; she was gone. Sometimes she did this. In the moments when other couples would fight or come together, she left me. With one foot in the bath, I stood waiting for her to return. I waited for an unreasonably long time, long enough to realize that she wouldn't be back that day. But what if I waited it out, what if I stood there naked until she returned? I had done things like this before. I had hidden under cars for hours. I had written the same word seven hundred times in an effort to alchemize time. I studied my position in the bathtub. The foot in the water was already wrinkly. How would I feel when night fell? And when Pip came home, how long would it take her to look for me in the bathroom? And would she understand that time had stopped while she was gone? And, even if she did realize that I had performed this impossible feat for her, what then? She was never thankful or sympathetic.

I left the bath and paced around our tiny room. It didn't even occur to me to go outside; I had no idea how to navigate the city without her. There was only one thing that I couldn't do when she was with me, so after a while I lay down on the couch and did this. I closed my eyes and ran through my memories from our childhood. We were under the covers on her mom's foldout sofa, or on the top bunk of my bunk bed, or in a tent in her back yard. Every location was potent in its own way. No matter where we were, it would begin when Pip whispered, "Let's mate." She'd scoot on top of me; we'd clamp our arms around each other's backs and rub ourselves against each other's small hipbones trying to achieve friction. When we did it right, the feeling came on like a head-rush of the whole body.

But just before I got there I noticed a clicking noise in the air. It was distractingly present, quietly insistent. Above my head, our five Chinese paper lanterns were rocking slightly of their own accord. As I reached toward them I suddenly realized why, but I was too late to stop myself. I shook a lantern and cockroaches came pouring out. They were crawling on each other even as they fell. They were determined and surviving as they passed each other in the air. They were planning the conquest of wherever they landed before they had even touched down. And when they hit the ground they didn't die—they didn't even think of dying. They ran.

When Pip finally came home, we agreed that the Leslie job had not been worth the money. But a few days later we saw Nastassja Kinski in the movie "Paris, Texas." She was wearing a long red sweater and working in a peepshow. I thought it looked like a pretty easy job, so long as Harry Dean Stanton didn't show up, but Pip didn't agree.

"No way. I'm not gonna do that."

"I could do it without you."

This made her so angry that she did the dishes. We never did this unless we were trying to be grand and self-destructive. I stood in the doorway and tried to maintain my end of our silence while watching her scratch at calcified noodles. In truth, I had not yet learned how to hate anyone but my parents. I was actually just standing there in love. I was not even really standing; if she had walked away suddenly, I would have fallen.

"I won't do it—never mind."

"You sound disappointed."

"I'm not."

"It's O.K. I know you want them to look at you."

"Who?"

"Men."

"No, I don't."

"If you do that, then I can't be with you anymore."

This was, in a way, the most romantic thing she had ever said to me. It implied that we were living together not because we had grown up together and were the only people we knew but because of something else. Because we both didn't want men to look at me. I told her that I would never work in a peepshow, and she stopped doing the dishes, which meant that she was O.K. again. But I wasn't O.K. In ten years we had touched only three times, not including the thing with Leslie. It seemed as though we'd stopped mating on the day we learned what fucking was.

These were the three times:

When she was eleven, her uncle tried to molest her. When she told me about it, I cried and curled up in a ball for forty minutes until she uncurled me. I kept my eyes shut as she pulled my knees away from my chest, and I knew that if I didn't open my eyes it would happen, and it did. She slid her hand under my tights and felt around until she had located the thing she knew on herself. Then she shook her finger in a violent, animal way. When it was over she told me not to tell anyone and I didn't know if she meant about this thing with me or about her uncle.

When we were fourteen, we got drunk for the first time and for a few minutes everything seemed possible and we kissed. This encounter felt promisingly normal, and in the following days I waited for more kissing, perhaps even some kind of exchange of rings or lockets. But nothing was exchanged. We each kept our own things.

In our last year of high school, I momentarily had one other friend. She was just an ordinary girl. Her name was Tammy. She liked the Smiths. There was no way I could ever have fallen in love with her, because she was just as pathetic as me. Every day she told me everything that she was thinking, and I guessed that this was what most girls did together. I wanted to talk about myself, too, but it was hard to know where to begin. So I just hung out, in a loose imitation of Pip. Pip did not think much of Tammy, but she was mildly intrigued by the normalcy of our friendship.

"What do you guys do?"

"Nothing. Listen to tapes and stuff."

"That's it?"

"Last weekend we made peanut-butter cookies."

"Oh. That sounds like fun."

"Are you being sarcastic?"

"No, it does."

So Pip came along the next time I went to Tammy's house. As predicted, we listened to tapes. Pip asked if we were going to make peanut-butter cookies, but Tammy said that she didn't have the right ingredients. Then she threw

CHEMO SIDE EFFECTS: VISION

Gnats in dervish clouds,
indistinguishable, words fizzle.

Or keep fading in and
out of focus—
tiny climbers screened
in cheesecloth mist, sliding
along the oblong glacier.

Serifs ascending, descending,
I want to recognize all of you
even when you're a dozen to the pinhead—
f's fiddlehead fern,
hydrofoil dot balancing
on i's pilaster,
the diminutive compartments of a's, e's, p's,
beerbellied cousins d and b.

But they hunch together,
a jumble of type
after the printer's apprentice upends
the basket. Impenetrable
as a playground clique,
schools of black fish foggily quavering
on silty beds . . .

Eyes that have brought me so many words,
are you too old for the world to keep courting?
Days, lay out your wares in the honking bazaar!

—So many small things I still want to see:
sheen of my nephew's corner eyelash,
snowflake circuitry, fleas' thighs,
nebulae flocking in my husband's iris,
the peaks and valleys of each mustard seed.

—*Elise Partridge*

herself down on the bed and asked us if we were girlfriends or what. An appalling emptiness filled the room. I stared out the window and repeated the word "window" in my head. I was ready to *window window window* indefinitely, but suddenly Pip answered.

"Yeah."

"Cool. I have a gay cousin."

Tammy told us that her room was a safe space and we didn't have to pretend, and then she showed us a neon-pink sticker that her cousin had sent her. It said "Fuck Your Gender." We all looked at the sticker in silence, absorbing its two meanings—at *least* two, probably more. Tammy seemed to be waiting for something, as if Pip and I were going to obediently fall upon each other the moment we read the sticker's bold command. I knew that we were a disappointment, meekly sitting on the bed. Pip must have felt this, too, because she abruptly threw her arm over my shoulder. This had never happened before, so, understandably, I froze. And then very gradually I recalibrated my body into a casual attitude. Pip just blinked when I sighed and flopped my hand onto her thigh. Tammy watched all this and even gave a slight nod of approval before shifting her attention back to the music. We listened to the Smiths, the Velvet Underground, and the Sugarcubes. Pip and I did not move from our position. After an hour and twenty minutes, my back ached and my hand felt numb and unaffiliated with the rest of my body. I asked Tammy where the rest room was and then ran out of the room.

In the powdery warmth of the bathroom I felt euphoric. I locked the door and made a series of involuntary, baroque gestures in the mirror. I waved maniacally at myself and contorted my face into hideous, unlovable expressions. I washed my hands as if they were children, cradling first one and then the other. I was experiencing a paroxysm of selfhood. The scientific name for this spasm is the Last Hurrah. The feeling was quickly spent. I dried my hands on a tiny blue towel and walked back to the bedroom.

I knew it just the moment before I saw it. I knew that I would find them together on the bed; I knew that I would be stunned; I knew that they would spring apart and wipe their mouths. I knew that Pip would not look me in the eye. I knew that I'd never speak to Tammy again. I knew that we would all graduate from high school and that Pip and I would live together as planned. And I knew that she did not want me in that way. She never would. Other girls, any girl, but not me.

Now that we had paid the rent, we felt entitled to mention the cockroach situation to the landlord. He told us that he would send someone over, but that we shouldn't get our hopes up.

"Why not?"

"Well, it's not just your apartment—the whole building's infested."

"Maybe you should have them do the whole building, then."

"It wouldn't do any good. They'd just come over from other buildings."

"It's the whole block?"

"It's the whole world."

I told him never mind, then, and got off the phone before he could hear Pip hammering. We were making some renovations—specifically, we were building a basement. Our apartment was small, but the ceilings were high and there was a tantalizing amount of unused space above our heads. Pip

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thought that lofts were for hippies, so even though our studio was on the second floor, she had sketched out a design that would allow us to live on a low-ceilinged main floor and then, whenever we were feeling morose, descend a ladder to the basement. We would leave the really heavy things down there, like the couch and the bathtub, but everything else would come upstairs. We could both picture the basement perfectly in our heads. It had a smell—damp, mineral—but was not entirely uncivilized. Warmth and beams of light seeped through the ceiling. Up there was home. Dinner was waiting for us there.

One of the many great reasons for building a basement was our access to free wood. Pip had met a girl whose father owned Berryman's Lumber and Supply. Kate Berryman. She was just a year younger than us and went to the private high school by Pip's grandma's house. I had never met her, but I was glad that we were using her. We practiced a loose, sporadic form of class warfare that sanctioned every kind of thievery. There was no person, no business, no library, hospital, or park that had not stolen from us, be it psychically or historically, we'd concluded, and thus we were forever trying to regain what was ours. Kate probably thought that she was on our side of the restitution when she struggled to pull large pieces of plywood out of the back of her parents' station wagon. She left them in the alley behind our building, honking three times as she drove away. We hauled the wood upstairs, convinced that we had hoodwinked everyone. We were always getting away with something, which implied that someone was always watching us, which meant that we were not alone in this world.

Each morning, Pip made a list of what we needed to do that day. At the top of the list was usually "Go to bank"—where they had free coffee. The next items were often vague—"Find out about food stamps," "Library card?"—but the list still gave me a cozy feeling. I liked to watch her write it, knowing that someone was steering our day. At night we discussed how we would decorate the basement, but during the day our progress was slow. Mostly what we had was a lot of pieces of wood; they leaned against the walls and lay across the couch like untrained dogs.

We were trying to nail a post into the linoleum kitchen floor when Pip decided that we needed a certain kind of bracket.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah. I'll call Kate and she'll bring it."

Pip made the call and then went to take a shower. I continued hammering long nails through the post and into the floor. The post became secure. It was a satisfying feeling. It wouldn't bear any kind of weight, but it stood on its own. It was almost as tall as me and I couldn't help naming it. It looked like a Gwen.

The buzzer rang and Pip ran damply to the door. It was Kate. I looked up at her from where I was sitting on the kitchen floor. She was wearing a school uniform.

"Where's the bracket?" I said.

With panic in her eyes, she looked at Pip. Pip took her hand, turned to me, and said, "We have to tell you something."

I suddenly felt chilled. My ears were so cold that I had to press my hands against them. But I realized that this made me look as if I were trying to avoid listening, like the monkey who hears no evil. So I rubbed my palms together and asked, "Are *your* ears cold?"

Pip didn't respond, but Kate shook her head no.

"O.K. Go ahead."

"Kate and I are going to live together at her parents' house."

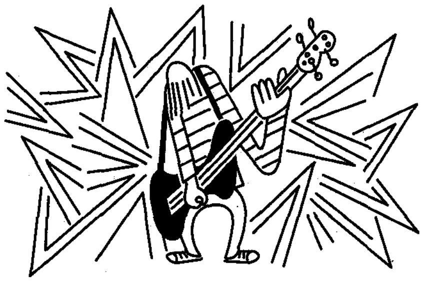
"Why?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I'm sure Kate's dad doesn't want you living in his house after we stole all that wood from him."

"I'm going to work at Berryman's Lumber to pay him back. I might even make enough money to get a car."

I thought about this. I imagined Pip driving a car, a Model T, wearing goggles and a scarf that blew behind her in the wind.



"Can I work at Berryman's Lumber, too?"

Pip was suddenly angry.

"Come on!"

"What? I can't? Just say I can't if I can't."

"You are purposely not getting it!"

"What?"

She raised Kate's hand clasped in her own and shook it in the air.

Suddenly my ears were hot, they were boiling, and I had to fan my hands at either side of my head to cool them down. This was too much for Pip; she grabbed her backpack and marched out of the apartment with Kate following her.

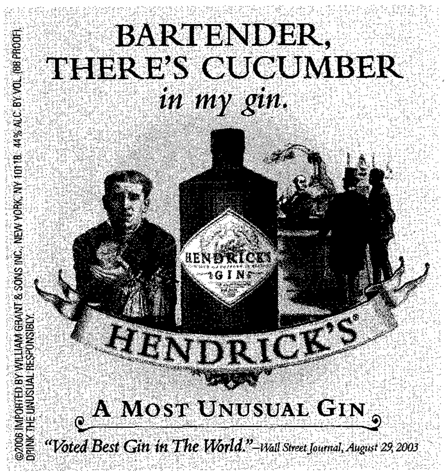
I could not let her leave the building. I ran down the hall and threw myself on her. She shook me off; I locked my arms around her knees. I was sobbing and wailing, but not like a cartoon of someone sobbing and wailing—this was really happening. If she left, I would become mute, like those children who have witnessed horrible atrocities. Pip was prying my fingers off her shins. Kate kneeled down to help her, and I was repulsed by the touch of her puddinglike skin. I wanted to puncture it. I lunged at her chest. Pip took advantage of this moment to scuttle down the stairs and somehow Kate was behind her. I ran after them, watched them scurry into Kate's car. Before they pulled away, I shut my eyes and hurled myself onto the sidewalk. I lay there. This was my last hope—that Pip would take pity on me. I heard their car idling beside me. I listened to the traffic and to the sound of pedestrians stepping carefully around me. I could almost hear Kate and Pip arguing in the car, Pip wanting to get out and help me, Kate urging her to leave. I pressed my cheek against the pavement in prayer. A pair of high heels clicked toward me and stopped. An elderly woman's voice asked if I was O.K. I whispered that I was fine and silently begged her to move on. But the woman was persistent, so finally I opened my eyes to tell her to leave. Kate's car was gone.

I slept for three days. At intervals I'd open my eyes just long enough to remember. Then I'd drop back into unconsciousness. In dreams, I was tunnelling toward her—if I could only dig deep enough I would find her. The tunnels narrowed as I crawled through them, until they became impossibly knotted strands of hair that I could only tear at.

On the afternoon of the third day, the phone finally rang. It was Mr. Hilderbrand. In some bizarre alternative reality, the rent was due again. A month had passed since we had lifted Leslie's dirty slip. I hung up the phone and looked around the room. My post was still standing in the kitchen, tactfully silent. A dangerously tall tablelike structure wobbled in the middle of the room. It was the first square foot of the upstairs. I crawled underneath it and imagined Pip and Kate eating dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Berryman. It was the kind of scenario she had often described. We could never walk past a fancy house without her presuming that its owners would want her to live with them if they only knew that she was available. She saw herself as a charming street urchin, a pet for wealthy mothers. It was a scam. There was nothing in the world that was not a con—suddenly I understood this.

I went to the bathroom and threw handfuls of water on my face. I took off the jeans and T-shirt I had been sleeping in. Naked, I crouched on the floor and sliced the legs off my pants with a box cutter. I put on what was left of the pants and they were itty-bitty. Itty-bitty teeny-tiny. I sawed through the T-shirt, leaving "If You Love Jazz" on the floor. "Honk" barely covered my small breasts, but hey. Hey, I was leaving the apartment. I was walking down the hall, and there was a small basket of old apples in front of the neighbor's door, with a sign that said, "For my neighbors—please take one." I was starving. I took an apple and the door swung open. I had never really met this neighbor, but now I could see that she was a junkie. An old junkie. She told me to take another one and then she asked for a hug. I hugged her hard with an apple in each hand. A week before, I would have been afraid to touch her, but now I knew that I could do anything.

I had no money for the bus, so I walked. It was an incredible distance. A horse would have got tired galloping there. When birds flew there, it was called migration. But it wasn't difficult;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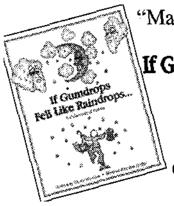
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it just took time. It was a new experience to walk across the city in tiny shorts and a half shirt that said "Honk." People honked without even seeing the shirt. I had the feeling that I might be shot in the back with an arrow or a gun, but this didn't happen. The world wasn't safer than I had thought; on the contrary, it was so dangerous that my practically naked self just fit right in—like a car crash, this kind of thing happened every day.

The place I was walking to was in a strip mall, between a pet store and a check-cashing place. I asked the man at the counter if they were hiring, and he gave me a form to fill out on a clipboard. When I handed it back, he stared at it without moving his eyes, which made me think that maybe he couldn't read. He said that I could start that night if I wanted to come back at nine. I said, "Great." He said that his name was Allen. I said that my name was Gwen.

I hung out in the strip mall for three hours. The pet store was closed, but I could see the rabbits through the window. I pressed my fingers against the glass and an ancient lop-ear hopped toward me wearily. It looked at me with one eye and then the other. Its nose quivered and for a moment I felt that it recognized me. It knew me from before, like an old teacher or a friend of my parents. The rabbit's eyes darted across my clothes and sniffed my wild, sad urgency and guessed that I was up to no good. I stood up, brushed off my knees, and walked back into Mr. Peepers Adult Video Store and More.

The "and More" part was in the back. Allen left me there with a woman named Christy. She was sitting in a green plastic patio chair and wearing a pink OshKosh overall dress. Looking at the sturdy brass overall fasteners, I wondered if everything familiar was actually part of a secret sexual underworld. Christy showed me into a booth and began packing dildos and bottles and strings of beads into a sporty Adidas bag. Her tools were laid out on an old flowery towel that smelled like my grandmother. She wrapped the towel around a small empty jelly jar.

"What's that for?" I asked.

"Pee."

Even pee was in on this. She showed me the price list and the slot that money would come through. She raised the flat of her hand in the air as she described how the curtain would roll up. She cleaned a telephone receiver with Windex and a paper towel and warned me never to leave it sticky. Then, with hasty efficiency, she pulled her long, thin hair into a ponytail, swung the Adidas bag over her shoulder, and left.

The store suddenly felt very quiet, like a library. I sat on the green plastic chair and adjusted my shirt and shorts. The fluorescent lights droned with a timeless constancy. I looked up at them and imagined that they, not the stars, had hung over the long creation of civilization. They had droned over ice ages and Neanderthals, and now they droned over me. I walked into my booth. I didn't have anything to lay out on a towel; I didn't even have a towel. All I had was the key to my apartment. If I didn't make any money tonight I would be walking all the way back there. At night. In this outfit. I was in the unique situation of needing to give a live fantasy show in order to protect my personal safety.

I practiced taking the phone off the hook. I did it five times, quicker and quicker, as if this were the skill I would be paid for. I thought about the words that I would have to speak into it. I had never said any of those words, except as swear words. I tried to think of them as seductive. I tried to say them seductively into the receiver, but they came out in a swallowed whisper. What if I couldn't say them? How awkward would that be? The man would ask for his money back and I wouldn't get to take the bus. In a panic, I said all the dirty words I knew in one long curse: *Cocksucking ball-licking bitch whore cunt pussy-licking asshole fucker.* I hung up the phone. At least I could say them.

I sat in the plastic chair for more than three hours. During this time, two different men came into the store. They both peeked at me over the racks of videos, but neither of them walked to the back. After the second man left, Allen yelled out from behind the counter.

"That's the second one you've let go by!"

"What?"

"You've gotta be more aggressive! Can't just sit on your ass back there!"

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"Got it!"

Twenty minutes later, a man in a black sweatshirt came in. He peered over a rack of magazines at me and I rose to my feet and walked toward him. His sweatshirt had a picture of a galaxy on it with an arrow pointing to a tiny dot and the words "You are here." The man looked up at me and pretended to be surprised. I imagined him instinctively pulling off his hat in the presence of a lady, but he wasn't wearing a hat.

"Are you interested in a live fantasy show, sir?"

"Yeah. O.K."

He followed me to the back of the store. We parted for a moment and reunited inside the booth with the curtained glass between us. I heard a Velcro wallet ripping open, twenty dollars fell lightly into the locked plastic box, and the curtain rose. He already had his penis in one hand and the phone in the other. I lifted the receiver. But, as I had feared, I was mute. I stood paralyzed, as if on a rock over a cold lake. I was never good at jumping in, letting go of one element and embracing another. I could stand there all day, letting the other kids go in front of me forever. He was pumping it up and down, and it was a strange sight, not something you see every day; in fact, I had never seen this before. He said something into the phone, but I didn't catch it. Despite how close we were, the reception was not very good.

"Excuse me?"

"Can you take off your clothes?"

"Oh. O.K."

From the start, one is trained not to take off one's clothes in front of strangers. Keeping one's clothes on is actually the No. 1 rule for civilization. Even a duck or a bear looks civilized when clothed. I pulled down my shorts, slid off my underwear, lifted my shirt over my head. I stood there, naked, like a bear or a duck. The man looked at me with grim concentration, my pale breasts, the puff of hair between my legs, back and forth between these poles. And he checked occasionally to make sure that I was looking at him. I diligently stared at his penis and hoped that this was enough, but after a few seconds he asked me if I liked what I saw. Again I was on the rock; kids splashed below me yelling "Jump!" I knew that jumping was like dying. I would have to let go of everything. I considered what I had. She hadn't called, she wouldn't call, I was alone, and I was here—not in some abstract sense, not here on earth or here in the universe, but really here, standing naked before this man. I pushed my hand between my legs and said, "Your big hard cock is making me so horny."

At 5 A.M., I was gliding through the night on a bus. The bus was just a formality, though—actually I was flying, in the air, and I was taller than most people are, I was nine or twelve feet tall, and I could fly, I could jump over cars, I could say "cock" ravenously, gently, coyly, demandingly. I could fly. And I had three hundred and twenty-five dollars in my pocket. Standing with one foot in the bathtub until Pip returned wasn't just a way to stop time—it was also a ritual to bring her back. I would be Gwen until she came home.

I bought a lime-green negligee, a dildo, which I de-virginized myself with, and a bobbed chestnut-colored wig. I hated my job, but I liked the fact that I could do it. I had once believed in a precious inner self, but now I didn't. I had thought that I was fragile, but I wasn't. It was like suddenly being good at sports. I didn't care about football, but it was pretty amazing to be in the N.F.L. I told long involved stories that revolved around my own perpetually wet pussy. I spread open every part of my body. I told customers that I missed them, and these customers became regulars and these regulars became stalkers. I learned to stay inside until the moment before my bus came, and then dash past anyone who was waiting in the parking lot, waving and yelling, "Come see me on Thursday!"

And I missed her terribly.

One evening, the bus was late and a customer followed me out to the curb. He stood beside me at the bus stop and I ignored him, and then he started spitting. First he spat on the pavement, then more generally in the air. I felt tiny wet specks blow onto my face and I pressed my lips together and stepped back. His harassment relied on a logic so foreign that I felt disoriented. I couldn't gauge whether this was terrifying or silly, and it was this feeling that

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"Are you my mommy?"

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told me to go back inside. I walked, then ran, slamming the door behind me. Mr. Peepers was not exactly a safe haven, though, and I couldn't stay there forever. I asked Allen to go outside and see if the customer was still there. He was. Couldn't Allen tell him to leave? Allen felt that he could not, because (a) he wasn't breaking the law, and (b) he was a good customer. Allen thought that I should call a friend or a cab to pick me up.

I had been waiting for this moment, and I marvelled at how organically it had arisen. I usually imagined poisoning myself or getting hit by a car. Someone official—a cop or a nurse—would ask me if there was anyone I wanted to call. I would gasp her name. "She works at Berryman's Lumber and Supply," I would say. This situation was not as dire, but it did involve safety, and, more important, it hadn't been my idea to call her. I had been ordered, almost commanded, by a superior, Allen.

I called Berryman's Lumber quickly, almost distractedly, modelling myself on the kind of person who would have a question about replacement saw blades. But the moment the line began ringing my senses dilated, winnowing out everything that was not the sound of my own heart.

"Berryman's Lumber and Supply. How can I help you?"

"I'm trying to reach Pip Greeley?"

"Just a sec."

Just a sec. Just two months. Just a lifetime. Just a sec.

"Hello?"

"It's me."

"Oh, hi."

I knew this wouldn't do. This *Oh, hi.* I couldn't be the person who elicited a response like this. I straightened my wig. I smiled into the air the way I smiled when customers unbuckled their belts, and I made my eyes laugh as if everything were some version of a good time. I began again.

"Hey, I'm in a bind here and wonder if you could help me out."

"Yeah? What?"

"I'm working at this place, Mr. Peepers? And there's this really creepy guy hanging around. Do you have a car?"

She was silent for a moment. I could almost hear the name Mr. Peepers vibrating in her head. It described a man with eyes the size of clocks. She had devoted her whole life to avoiding Mr. Peepers, and now here I was, cavorting with him. I was either repulsive and foolish or I was something else. Something surprising. I held my breath.

She said she guessed she could borrow a van and could I wait twenty minutes until she got off work? I said I probably could.

We didn't talk in the van, and I didn't look at her, but I could feel her looking at me many times with bewilderment. I usually changed my clothes and took off my wig before I went home, but I had been right not to do this today. I looked out the window for other passengers in love with their drivers, but we were well disguised—we feigned boredom and prayed for traffic. Just as her former home came into view, Pip made a sudden left turn and asked if I wanted to see where she lived now.

"You mean Kate's?"

"No, that didn't work out. I'm living in this guy I work with's basement."

"Sure."

The basement was what is called "unfinished." It was dirt, with a few boards thrown down here and there, islands that supported a bed and some milk crates. Pip waved a flashlight around and said, "It's only seventy-five dollars a month."

"Really."

"Yeah, all this room! It's more than fifteen hundred square feet. I can do anything I want with it."

She walked me between the beams, describing her plans. Then she slipped the flashlight into a hanging loop of string and a dim spotlight fell on her pillow. I stretched out on the bed and yawned. She stared at the length of me.

"You can stay here if you want—I mean, if you're tired."

"I might just nap."

"I have some cleaning up to do."

"You clean up. I'll nap."

I listened to her sweeping. She swept closer and closer, she swept all around the edges of the mattress. Then she laid the broom down and climbed into bed with me. We lay there, perfectly still, for a long time. Finally, Pip adjusted her shoulders so that the outermost edge of her T-shirt grazed my arm; I recrossed my legs, carelessly letting my ankle fall against her shin. Five more seconds passed, like heavy bass-drum beats. Then we turned to each other, and our hands grabbed urgently, even painfully. It seemed necessary to be brutal at first, to mime anger and concede nothing. But once we had wrestled deep into the night and turned off the flashlight, I was surprised by her gentle attentions.

So this was what it was like not to be me. This was who Pip was. Because, make no mistake, I kept my wig on the whole time. I believed it had made all of this possible, and I think I was right. The wig and the fact that I did not cry, even though I desperately wanted to cry, to tell her how miserable I had been, to squeeze her and make her promise never to leave again. I wanted her to beg me to quit my job and then I wanted to quit my job.

But she didn't beg, and in fact Mr. Peepers was essential. Each night she picked me up in the Berryman's Lumber van, took me under the house, and made love to me. And each morning I went home and took off my wig. I scratched my sweaty scalp and let my head breathe for two hours before getting on the bus to go to work. I lived like this for eight beautiful days. On the ninth day, Pip suggested that we go out to breakfast before I went to work.

"I wish I could, but I have to go home and get ready."

"You look great."

"But I have to wash my hair."

"Your hair looks great."

Our eyes locked and an unfriendly feeling passed between us. Of course it was a wig—I knew she knew this—but she was suddenly determined to call my bluff. I imagined for a moment that we were duelling, delicate foils raised high.

"O.K., then, let's have breakfast."

"I can drop you off at Mr. Peepers."

"Fine. Thank you."

Everyone knows that if you paint a human being entirely with house paint he will live, as long as you don't paint the bottoms of his feet. It only takes a little thing like that to kill a person. I had worn the wig for almost thirty hours straight, and as I stripped and jiggled and moaned I began to feel warm, overly warm. But after each show a new customer appeared. By midday, sweat was running down the sides of my face, but the men just kept coming. It was a day of incredible profits. Allen even patted me on the back as I left, saying, "Good work, champ." Pip was waiting in the van, but the walk across the parking lot felt long and strange. I thought I recognized a customer crouching by his car, but, no, it was just a normal man huddled over something in a cage. He murmured, "That's right, we're going to take you home."

Pip put me right to bed and even borrowed a thermometer from her co-worker upstairs. But she did not suggest that I take off my wig, and in my fever I understood what this meant. I saw her in the clearing with a pistol and I knew without even looking that my hands were empty. But I could win by pretending to have a pistol. If I said "Bang!" and let her shoot me, I would win. If I died this way, as Gwen, would the rest of me go on living? And what was the rest of me? I fell asleep with this question and tunnelled through the night ripping at the knotted strands until finally the wig came off. I didn't put it on in the morning and Pip didn't ask me how I was feeling; she could see that I was fine. She didn't offer to drive me to work, either, and we both knew that she wouldn't be there to pick me up.

I sat in the green plastic chair under the fluorescent lights. It was a slow day. It seemed as if all the men in the world were too busy to masturbate. I imagined them out there doing virtuous things, solving crimes and teaching their children how to do cartwheels. It was the last hour of my eight-hour shift and I had not given a single show. It was almost eerie. I watched the clock and the door and began to place bets between them. If no customers came for me in the next fifteen minutes, I would yell Allen's name. Fifteen minutes passed.

"Allen!"

"What."

"Nothing."

There were only twenty minutes left now. If no one came in the next twelve minutes, I would yell the word "I," as in *me, myself, and*. After seven minutes, the door dinged and a man came in. He bought a video and left.

"I!"

"What?"

"Nothing."

It was the final eight. If no customers came in, I would yell the word "quit." As in *no more, enough, I'm going home.* I stared at the door. With each breath I took, it threatened to open. With each passing minute. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. ♦

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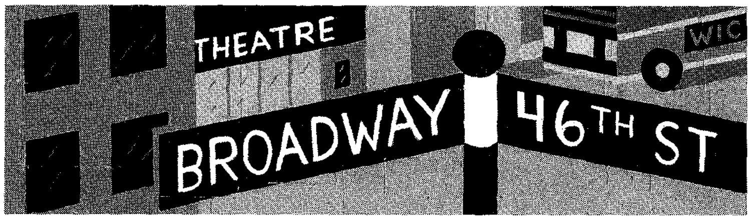


ON TELEVISION

HER DÉBUT

Katie Couric and "The CBS Evening News."

BY TAD FRIEND

It's hard to say which of Katie Couric's news broadcasts last week was the most surprising. Was it her first one, on Tuesday, which she delivered live from the Burning Man festival? Or Wednesday's installment, which began with her swooping into her anchor chair on a Peter Pan wire? Or Thursday's, in which she fashioned her voice-overs as a series of Ezra Pound-like cantos? On reflection, I'd vote for Friday's show, when Couric impishly read the news wearing a black burka. (A Prada burka, but still.)

In actuality, of course, when Couric's long-awaited broadcast débuted—three months after she left NBC's "Today" show—it proved to be no great departure (though, to be fair, neither ABC's Charles Gibson nor NBC's Brian Williams has an anchor desk that looks like a giant pair of ski goggles). CBS's C.E.O., Leslie Moonves, had evidently abandoned his stated intention to lay the evening news's "voice of God" format to rest. What if, instead, that "voice of God" issued from the girl next door, the one with the great legs and the appealingly crooked grin?

As it turns out, that voice might not have all that much to say. In its first week, "The CBS Evening News with Katie Couric" made so much room for soft news—"Snapshots" of Tom Cruise's alien love child; pop-song teasers for the closing human-interest story—and a my-two-cents segment in which the likes of Rush Limbaugh and Morgan Spurlock (the network's version of voiceless outsiders) opined, that her broadcast usually had time for four correspondents' reports instead of the standard six or seven. All these mild innovations, then, made the world seem about fifty per cent smaller. On Friday, three of the broadcast's segments were set in either New York or Pennsylvania.

Couric got off to a strained start, proving to be a halting reader of the teleprompter and a tense clutcher of the ceremonial pen and shuffler of the ceremonial papers. But, in the course of the week, her "Snapshots" improved—by Thursday, the image was of the new building designs for the World Trade Center site—and her sass and bounce began to shine through. On Wednesday, introducing a report on a blind ninth grader who navigates by echolocating with tongue clicks, she declared, "I really think this next story is going to knock your socks off!" On Thursday, when the correspondent Jon LaPook was telling Couric about a new papillomavirus vaccine that girls should take before they start having sex, he happened to mention that twenty-five per cent of fifteen-year-old girls are sexually active. Couric, who has a fifteen-year-old daughter, rejoined, "Well, you've just ruined my day."

It wasn't the traditional evening news, exactly, but, then, the evening news hasn't been particularly traditional since 1981, when Walter Cronkite retired. Nowadays, the networks assume that you're up to date on the headlines, and they devote much of their energy to explaining how those headlines will affect your bank account and your life expectancy. Couric hit this note hard. On Tuesday, she promised three separate times that an upcoming report on a new oil field in the Gulf of Mexico would explain whether the discovery would mean "cheaper prices at the pump." The report didn't actually address how the find would affect gasoline prices—but, then, Couric is so darn likable.

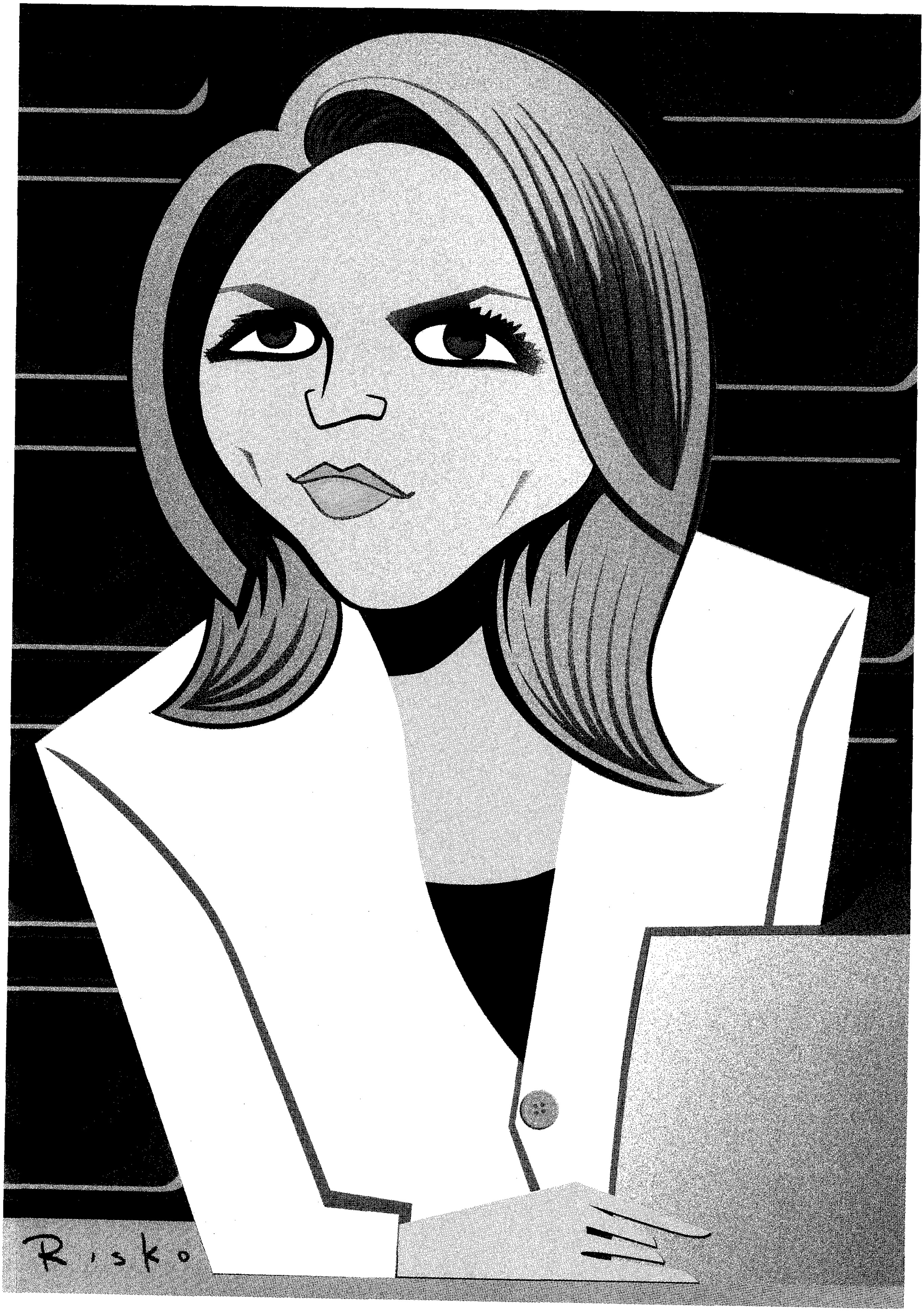
That may be enough. Anchors, who are customarily onscreen for only three to six minutes a night, are not chosen for their investigative skills or their familiarity with the tax code. They are chosen for their uncommon ability to summon trust, to shepherd us from the end of the day to the beginning of the night, and to watch over us during national traumas. On an ordinary day, a trusted anchor is like that first Martini.

Trust in a correspondent develops very slowly. Bob Schieffer, with his bobblehead-doll proportions and reservoir of tempered consternation—"How in the *world* could something like this happen?"—was an unexpected success as CBS's interim replacement for Dan Rather, because he resembled the big-headed titans of yore, the David Brinkleys and John Chancellors and Eric Sevareids, whose marmoreal sternness was leavened only by the occasional half smile at an offbeat story—Tiny Tim and his ukulele, say.

That it was CBS that gave Couric a shot as the first solo female anchor was no surprise. Last-place networks take risks, and CBS has something of a history of equating cheesecake with ratings. The network paired Connie Chung with Rather from 1993 to 1995, disastrously, and in the sixties the network's president, James Aubrey, sent around a famous programming memo calling, redundantly, for "broads, boobs, and busts."

But it was a little surprising that Couric, rather than someone like Diane Sawyer, got the nod: anchors incline toward coolness, and Couric is a born per-

By the end of Couric's first week, her natural empathy—and her bounce—became more visible.



ROBERT RISKO

former, all nerve and moxie. During her fifteen years at "Today," she loved dressing up as SpongeBob SquarePants, singing with Tony Bennett, and jitterbugging with Al Gore. Naturally, then, CBS gave her a serious makeover to match these more sober responsibilities—or, rather, a "serious" makeover. Couric's playful suits were replaced with strands of pearls and elegant fitted ensembles in the strictest black and white and gray, conveying the message that our little girl had grown up. (Unfortunately, her makeup on the first night was slathered on, particularly around her eyes, conveying the message that our little girl had grown up and become Tammy Faye Bakker.)

Another of Couric's winning traits is her empathy; when she touched the wounded heads of Reginald Denny, the beating victim in the Los Angeles riots, and the so-called Central Park jogger, the moments were genuine and affecting. Thus far, her interviews from the anchor's chair have not tapped that wellspring of feeling. Indeed, her conversation with President Bush on Wednesday—which the show repeatedly billed as an "exclusive"—was a washout. Bush simply rehashed talking points from his news conference that day, at which he had announced the transfer of fourteen "high value" terrorists from secret C.I.A. prisons to Guantánamo Bay, and Couric didn't press him. To her credit, she did manage to keep a fairly straight face when, in response to her question about what the government had gleaned from interrogating the prisoners, Bush squirmed like a truant schoolboy and finally offered up "The fact that, uh (*sigh*), Khalid Sheikh Mohammed had got somebody to (*sigh*), um, to line up people to fly airlines, to crash airlines, on I think the West Coast, or somewhere in America. And these would be Southeast Asians."

That evening, ABC crisply laid out what Mohammed's target had been (the Library Tower, in Los Angeles), as well as which additional terror plots had supposedly been thwarted, and obstacles that the President may face in the Senate on legislation that would establish military tribunals. At CBS, Couric's "get" worked against both comprehensiveness and comprehension; after airing so much footage of Bush, she and her correspondents had little time left to explain what these developments signified. Will it mean cheaper prices at the pump?

In the past twenty-five years, the evening newscasts have lost nearly half their audience, and the average age of the remaining viewers—made melancholy by the time slot's commercials for Ensure, Benefiber, Vytorin, Avodart, Vesicare, and Polident—is sixty. The challenge that the networks face is keeping these loyal viewers even as they desperately court Generations X and Y, who are presumed to distrust the mainstream media and to live only for streaming video of Paris Hilton's latest capers.

Charles Gibson plays to the traditional audience by delivering a broadcast that is a curatorial replica of Peter Jennings's, lacking only Jennings's aura, curiosity, and passion. When Gibson stands stiffly behind his mod little desk, he resembles the book-burning fireman played by Oskar Werner in "Fahrenheit 451"—yesterday's version of tomorrow. Brian Williams, though he is a devoted blogger, also seems captive to the standards of an earlier era. Williams has a sense of humor—on Tuesday he signed off by wishing Couric "good luck . . . in limited amounts"—but he usually suppresses it so as not to offend the ghosts of John Cameron Swayze, Chet Huntley, and Tom Brokaw, the bygone NBC anchors whose swirling images kick off his show. He strives to be anchormanly, in the hope that it still matters.

CBS has sought to reassure its longtime viewers by having Cronkite himself tape the broadcast's introduction. But Couric's anxiety about whether anyone out there still cares about the world by 6:30 P.M. is evident, and may endure even after her show works out its kinks. She concluded her first broadcast by saying, almost prayerfully, "Thank you *so much* for watching, and I hope to see you tomorrow night."

It's always curiously touching when a public figure reveals such vulnerability—Sally Field at the Oscar ceremonies comes to mind—but Couric had no reason for concern. Unburdened by the gravamen of actual news, her broadcast instantly vaulted past NBC and ABC in the ratings. We like you, Katie, we really like you. ♦

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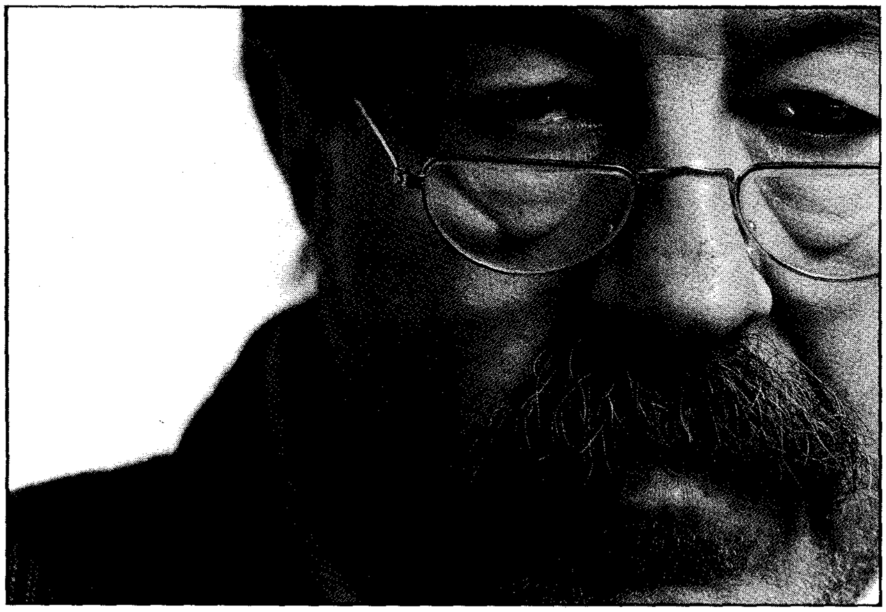
A CRITIC AT LARGE

WAR AND REMEMBRANCE

Shrouded by the Günter Grass controversy is an extraordinary new memoir.

BY IAN BURUMA

"History, or, to be more precise, the history we Germans have repeatedly mucked up, is a clogged toilet," the narrator in Günter Grass's most recent novel, "Crabwalk," says. "We flush and flush, but the shit keeps rising." Now the author, a Nobel laureate widely regarded as "the conscience of Germany"—a man who has regularly sermonized against the forces of reaction and the corruptions of power—is up to his neck in it himself.



Grass, the scourge of postwar Germany, has reëmerged as a confessor and a penitent.

ANDREJ REISER / BILDERBERG

Just last month, Grass revealed something that he had been keeping to himself during half a century in public life: that he was once a member of the Waffen-S.S. Grass, who was born in 1927, never pretended to have escaped the war unstained. He was open about the fact that, along with many Germans of his generation, he went through the usual ranks: the Jungvolk, the Hitler Youth, the Labor Front, and then the Army. Like most, though not all, of his cohort, he believed that his Führer would achieve a glorious victory, even as Soviet troops and Allied bombers were laying waste to the Third Reich. Many former Hitler Youths, still teen-agers at the time of defeat, were drafted into ragtag units operating anti-aircraft guns. As far as his readers knew, Grass had been one of them.

In a new memoir, entitled "Beim Haüten der Zwiebel" ("Peeling the Onion"), published in Germany this month, Grass explains that the story was a little more complicated. He had volunteered to serve on a submarine, but by late 1944 the Army was running out of men, and so he ended up in the Waffen-S.S., the military arm of Himmler's élite corps, which had come to be absorbed into the regular German Army. The Jörg von Frundsberg tank division, in which he served, was fighting a disastrous rearguard action against Soviet troops, who killed most of the old men and boys serving with Grass. He was very lucky to have survived.

The surprise is not that he served in such a unit; it's that he covered up the fact. In a recent television interview, Grass tried to explain why it had taken him so long to tell the truth—not a trivial question, since the Germans' difficulties in facing the truth have been a constant theme of his literary and political life. "It weighed on me," he said. "My silence through all those years is one of the reasons I wrote this book. It had to get out, at last."

The reactions, in Germany and outside, have been swift. Some people have defended him, but many have expressed outrage, especially those of more or less Grass's own age. Indeed, two young German novelists, Michael Kumpfmüller and Eva Menasse, wrote a piece that described the sound and fury as a "class reunion of old German intellectuals." One of these intellectuals, Joachim Fest, the famous biographer of Hitler and Speer, is a year older than Grass. He was not a member of the Hitler Youth but did serve in the Army. His forthcoming memoir is entitled, a little smugly, "Ich Nicht" ("Not Me"). Fest has declared Grass to be morally "deeply damaged," and says, "I wouldn't buy a used car from this man now." Other conservatives who, like Fest, had long felt the sharp end of Grass's censorious pen were quick to broaden the critique; in *Le Figaro,* Guy Sorman attacked Grass not just for covering up his own past but for being an apologist for "bad causes," such as Cuba and Communist China. Charlotte Knobloch, the vice-president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, suspected Grass of opportunism, creating a furor in order to drum up book sales, and compared him to the ultra-right German politician Franz Schönhuber, who "also revealed his S.S. membership just before publishing a memoir." Grass's moral authority, in her view, "has been made totally obsolete by this affair." There have been calls for Grass to return the Nobel Prize he received in 1999.

Perhaps the most painful blow of all, though, was delivered by Lech Walesa, the hero of Gdansk, which in the nineteen-thirties, when Grass grew up there, was a German-speaking city known as Danzig. It has made both men honorary citizens, and Walesa took the view that Grass should give up this honor. Grass responded by writing a letter to the mayor of Gdansk in which he pointed out that his books and his "political activity" were sufficient proof that he had learned the hard lessons of his youth. Shame had

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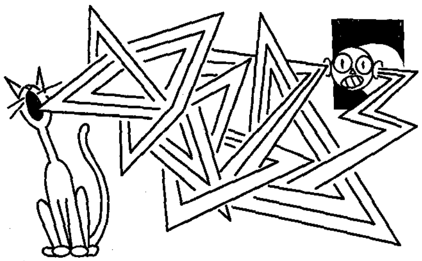
kept him from talking about his time in the Waffen-S.S.: "Only now, in my old age, I have found the form to discuss it in a wider context." Walesa said that he found the explanation "convincing," and no longer had a quarrel with Herr Grass.

Somewhat lost in the scandal is the fact that Grass has written a memoir of rare literary beauty. Beginning with his childhood in Danzig and ending with the publication, in 1959, of his first and most famous novel, "The Tin Drum," the book is not just an autobiography but also a meditation on memory—on the tricks it plays and the way it feeds the imagination of a born storyteller. Going back into the past, Grass writes, is like peeling an onion, uncovering layer after layer: a task that easily produces tears. Grass, who is aware of his propensity for creating stories, often uses such phrases as "don'tknowwhere" and "don'trememberwhen"—*weißnichtmehrwo, weißnichtmehrwann*—which sound as eccentric in German as they do in English. By deliberately mixing the characters from his fictions and his real life, he gives us a glimpse into the mind of the novelist. It is as though little Oskar Matzerath of "The Tin Drum," who lived in Danzig and stopped growing at the age of three, were as real to him as little Günter Grass. And in a way, of course, he is. Sometimes, when describing himself in the past, Grass switches to the third person, as though his old self were just another figment of his literary imagination.

"Peeling the Onion," like Grass's best novels, is filled with striking poetic imagery: the glass eye gleaming on a plate of potatoes while its owner goes off to the lavatory; the discomforting secrets "nesting like lice in pubic hair." Grass writes of gross physical details in a German that is exquisitely earthy. Many critics credit him with having rescued his national language from the pall of linguistic abuse by the Nazis—an endeavor he has described as the "duty to take the goose step out of German." He is also, in his fiction as in this memoir, rarely didactic, or polemical. The memoir, like "The Tin Drum," is a coming-of-age story, a bildungsroman. Grass starts off as a naïve, dreamy boy, with no political sense and with an underdeveloped capacity for skepticism. The shame of his Nazi childhood, in his own view, was his inability "to ask why." He unthinkingly accepted the Hitler Youth propaganda and Hitler's grandiose promises. When teachers suddenly disappeared from school, or synagogues were torched, he simply observed. He was a believer. The main lesson he learned, as a P.O.W., as a German during the Nuremberg trials, as a young man gaining political awareness, was not to be a believer any longer, to walk "the long route, paved with doubts," to abjure certainty and see only "many gray tones, between black and white."

There is much to be commended in Grass's public stands. The decent Social Democratic politics that the West German chancellor Willy Brandt represented in the early nineteen-seventies—especially his courageous and necessary gestures of atonement toward the Poles and the Jews—owed a lot to Grass, who wrote many of Brandt's speeches. But, for all his talk of doubt and gray tones, Grass has developed a penchant for shrill political pronouncements. He has stridently denounced other public figures who were tainted in any way by the past, and used German guilt far too often as a political bludgeon.

In 1985, Chancellor Helmut Kohl and President Ronald Reagan decided to remember the war and celebrate the postwar alliance of Western democracies, by laying wreaths at the site of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and then at a military cemetery in Bitburg. Grass called it an "insult," a "defilement of history," because among the thousands of graves were the remains of forty-nine Waffen-S.S. soldiers. Thirty-two of the soldiers were less than twenty-five years old when they died. Grass, as his critics have now had occasion to point out, never even hinted that he could easily have been one of them. Just as unequivocal was his declaration, in 1989, that Germany should remain divided, the unified state having "laid the foundations for Auschwitz." And his criticisms of the



United States show precious few shades of gray. The stationing of U.S. Pershing missiles on German soil, in the eighties, was likened to the Nazi plan to exterminate the Jews.

Why was this man, who dissembled for so long about his own past, so eager to expose the shameful secrets of others? Why was he so intent on imposing a collective guilt on his people, as if all Germans had followed Hitler as blindly as he had? And why is there such a discrepancy between the subtlety of his best narrative writing and the fierceness of his public scoldings? This chasm is not unique to Grass. The same could be said about other great writers: Céline, Harold Pinter, and José Saramago, to mention a few. But Grass is so proud of his post-Nazi identity as a doubter, as "a tireless supporter of the eternal on-the-one-hand-on-the-other-hand," that something begs to be explained.

"The German does not think politically, but tragically, mythically, heroically," Thomas Mann wrote. He was describing the Germans of Günter Grass's childhood and before. Years of authoritarian politics, overblown romanticism, and pompous militarism had encouraged among educated Germans a distaste for the messy compromises of liberal politics and the materialism of commercial enterprise. They celebrated, instead, a passion for spirituality and deep culture. German nationalism, even before the Third Reich, was often marked by a kind of religious exultation; liberal democracy and capitalism, especially of the American kind (*Amerikanismus*), were scorned both on the left and on the right.

Grass has sometimes described his childhood self as though he were indeed like Oskar Matzerath, a boy who refused to grow up and was without political convictions of his own. But Grass's memoir shows him in a slightly different light. He did have a world view, however inchoate. A young worshipper of great art—Dürer, Caravaggio, Velázquez—Grass had his idols, artistic as well as historic, and he longed to be in a smart uniform, adored by the girls. His father, a provincial shopkeeper, a good Roman Catholic, a "peace-loving family man . . . forever bent on harmony," filled him with loathing. There was nothing grand or exciting about him. He was, as Grass would say, a *Spiessbürger*, a stuffy petit bourgeois, without any tragic, mythical, or heroic qualities. This loathing, in Grass's recollection, was one of the reasons that he yearned to join the Army at the end of the Second World War. Grass wanted action, and a break from his family's *Spiessbürgertum*.

"I was spoiling for a fight with him," he writes about his father. "I would like to have murdered him with my Hitler Youth dagger." He was desperate to find escape routes. "All led in one direction. Away from here, to the battle front, one of the many fronts, as soon as possible." Grass does not use his restive adolescence to mitigate his sense of guilt. But his description of how he was drafted into the Waffen-S.S. is nonetheless revealing.

First, he was turned down by the Navy. Instead, he had to be satisfied with the Labor Front, practicing rifle drills and wearing a disappointing, even silly, "shit-brown" uniform. There followed a time of enforced idleness, fretting about the cramped family home, dreaming of patricide, and spending starstruck hours watching films of German heroism at the local cinema. And then, suddenly, the draft card arrived, telling him to report to the Waffen-S.S. in Dresden:

> Of Dresden, I can only remember the smell of burning and a glimpse through the sliding door of our cargo train: between the tracks and the burned-out façades of buildings, carbonized bundles were piled high. Some of us thought they were shrunken corpses. Others wanted to see dunnowhat. We argued about it, and numbed our horror with talk. As is still true today, what happened in Dresden was buried under chatter.

Was he shocked by the reputation of the S.S.? Not at all: "The boy, who saw himself as a man, was interested in the military hardware." Besides, there was something attractively European about the Waffen-S.S.; its volunteers included Frenchmen, Walloons, Dutchmen, Norwegians, Danes, and even some neutral Swedes, all battling on the Eastern Front to "save the West from the Bolshevist flood." Even the name of his division, Jörg von Frundsberg, had an appealing ring to it, since Grass knew von Frundsberg as "the leader of the Swabian Union during the peasant wars," in the sixteenth century. "He was someone who stood for freedom and liberation." In fact, most of von Frundsberg's battles were fought on behalf of Emperor Maximilian, who was hardly a paragon of freedom, but one

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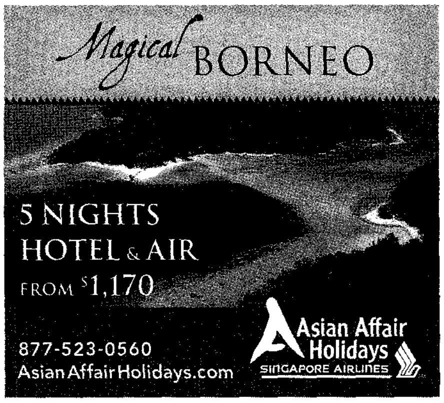
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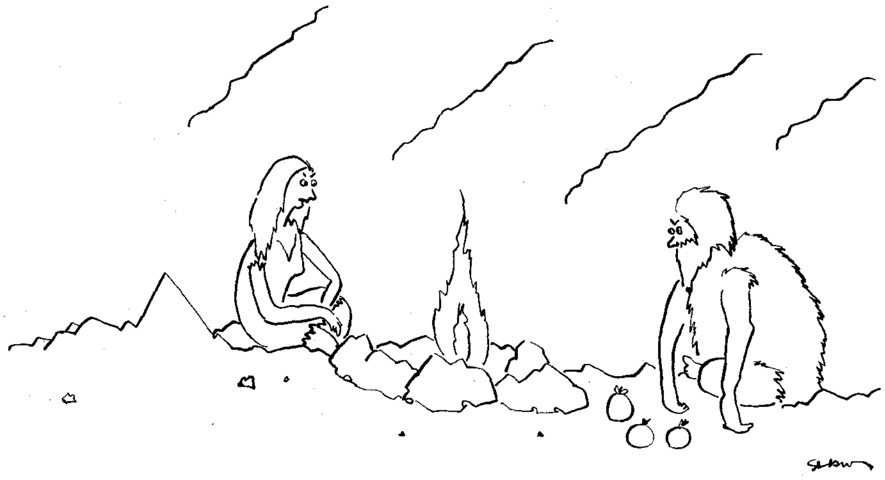

"Enough with the low-hanging fruit. How about some slow-moving meat?"

• •

should allow the young Grass his small romantic fancy. For what he did in the Waffen-S.S. was really no more than muddle through for his own survival. And yet, he writes, "I refused for many decades to bear the consequences of that word and those twin letters. Growing shame prevented me after the war from mentioning what I accepted with the dumb pride of my youth. But the burden remained, and no one could make it lighter." This was worse than the hunger of the first postwar years, he writes. "Like hunger, guilt and the shame that follows gnaw away at you, all the time. My hunger was only periodic, but my shame . . ."

This admission is a trifle overdramatic. It is almost as though even Grass's shame had an element of tragic myth, if not heroism. If there was often something puffed up about prewar German nationalism, the same could sometimes be said about the postwar professions of German guilt by people like Grass. Indeed, a propensity for mythic elevation besets even the once taboo discussion of German suffering during the war. For decades, serious intellectuals and politicians wouldn't talk about the effects of Allied terror bombing, say, or the expulsions from the German-speaking areas of Silesia and the Sudetenland: it all smacked of special pleading or worse, and was therefore confined to the right-wing fringes of German politics. This began to change recently, and Grass followed the trend with his 2002 novel, "Crabwalk," about the Wilhelm Gustloff, a Nazi cruise ship that was sunk by Soviet torpedoes in 1945, sending almost nine thousand German refugees, many of them children, to the bottom of the frozen sea.

The sinking of the Wilhelm Gustloff is an enormity worth recalling; and yet the tone of Grass's novel is oddly peevish. The narrator complains that it was "as if there were no room for another maritime disaster, as if only the victims of the Titanic could be remembered, not those of the Gustloff." He goes on, "The Internet was abuzz with a tearjerker of colossal proportions, the sinking of the Titanic freshly filmed in Hollywood and soon to be marketed as the greatest maritime catastrophe of all times." Much is made, earlier in the story, of the fact that the Gustloff, when it was still the flagship of Nazi cruises, was classless, an innovation that had wide appeal. The Titanic, we know, was anything but. These sentiments do not make the narrator, let alone the author, a Nazi apologist; Grass's repudiation of Nazi Germany needs no underscoring. But there is an element of contempt here—toward commercial culture and capitalism—that hints at some of Grass's earlier attitudes. It explains his hostility to America, and, even more, to German conservatives of his own generation.

The tensions between Günter Grass and the historian Joachim Fest are not simply political, even though Grass is a loyal Social Democrat and Fest is a conservative. They have something to do with social class, and are anchored in the early postwar period, when Konrad Adenauer, a conservative Catholic who had been opposed to the Nazis, was chancellor. Fest, from an anti-Nazi Catholic middle-class background rather like Adenauer's, has always tried to salvage German pride by depicting Hitler as a vulgar freak, who managed to seduce many Germans but not all. A core of educated, well-bred Germans resisted the Nazi temptation and, the thinking went, should be the bedrock of postwar German democracy.

In fact, many educated, well-bred Germans did not resist the temptation. But Adenauer believed that the transformation of Nazi Germany into a democratic republic could not succeed without the support of the solid German bourgeoisie: the bureaucrats, diplomats, and university professors; the doctors, lawyers, and industrialists, many of whom were far more tainted by the recent past than a relatively blameless youngster like Günter Grass. The United States, which needed West Germany as a dependable ally in the Cold War, was with Adenauer. This meant not only that the Nuremberg trials were swiftly wrapped up but that Adenauer refused to ratify the verdicts. Many prominent Nazis were released from prison. Attempts to weed out former Nazis from public office were either stopped or turned into a farce. The documents testifying, often falsely, to a person's innocence were named for a well-known washing detergent called Persil.

It was an unedifying, morally disturbing compromise. But it worked. The Federal Republic of Germany did become democratic, pro-American, and embedded in the liberal Western order. Nazi revanchists were marginalized. There was no "stab in the back" legend, such as crippled the Weimar Republic in the nineteen-twenties. Yet Grass, from a petit-bourgeois background, a convert to democracy, ashamed of his own youthful moral obtuseness, viewed Adenauer's Germany as an outrageous betrayal. Hence his hounding of such politicians as Kurt Georg Kiesinger, a postwar chancellor who had been a Nazi bureaucrat, and Karl Carstens, a President of the Federal Republic who had joined the Nazi Party in 1940 to further his career as a lawyer.

Grass's fury was stoked by his own

shame, no doubt, but also by class resentment. While "block leaders, petty officers, and small shopkeepers" fell victim to de-Nazification, he wrote in 1967, people like Kiesinger were, "because of their superior powers and responsibilities," left unscathed. With the requisite Persil documents, "not a few people, covered in brown shit, came to the white West." Even now, looking back on those early days, Grass loses all his vaunted feeling for the gray tones. Every word is filled with rage: "Chancellor Adenauer was like a mask, hiding everything I loathed: the pseudo-Christian hypocrisy, the disgusting, lying professions of innocence, and the ostentatious bourgeois respectability of a criminal gang in disguise."

This is harsh, but in the context of the early postwar decades Grass's voice was a necessary moral correction to Adenauer's pragmatism. To call Grass an arrogant, hypocritical huckster, as some do, is to forget how important his presence was when most Germans were too busy benefitting from the "economic miracle" to reflect on what had happened just a short time before. His compatriots needed to have their consciences pricked in the nineteen-fifties and sixties; and Grass, much to his credit, boosted social democracy when it needed boosting. The problem is that he hasn't been able to let go. The Nazi ghosts have continued to haunt him, and any kind of hypocrisy, material greed, or use of military force provokes hysterical denunciations. U.S. military force, especially, arouses his rage, for it reminds him of the compromises made by Adenauer's Germany to join the Cold War. Like Harold Pinter, whose anti-American rants Grass quotes with approval, he sometimes talks as if the United States were the Third Reich's successor. But, even when he does, there are hints of earlier enthusiasms, of a possibly unconscious nostalgia for more heroic, more mythical, more tragic times.

At a PEN conference in New York in 1986, Saul Bellow made a point about America that incurred Grass's anger. Bellow observed that American society did not pretend to lay great store by high culture but sought only to provide its citizens with "shelter, protection and a certain amount of security against injustice." Grass, shaking with indignation, referred to the poverty he had observed in the South Bronx and the consequent lack of freedom of its citizens. Poverty in the South Bronx was no doubt shocking, and there is plenty to criticize about American society, but Grass's rage remained puzzling. Perhaps it had something to do with precisely what Bellow hailed about his country: its unheroic materialism, its lack of a tragic sense, its indifference to high culture—all the things that Grass hated about the Adenauer years, and that many European intellectuals, on the right and the left, still find contemptible. They detest America because its popular culture, sweeping the world, threatens to make intellectuals marginal, and that is one thing Grass never wanted to be.

How much does it really matter what Grass said to Bellow, or what his critics say about Grass, or what Grass says about the "white West"? In the long run, not a great deal. Grass's intemperate pronouncements in the past few decades have scarcely driven German public opinion or foreign policy, and his best works—such as "The Tin Drum," "Cat and Mouse," "Dog Years," and probably his memoir, too—will be read long after the political polemics, not to mention the current storm over his belated confession, have been forgotten. But there's a connection between his polemical and literary work. Günter Grass is one of the last examples of a German tradition that puts poets and thinkers on a high pedestal, from which they deliver, like prophets, their verdicts on the world. There are times, certainly, when the writer can use his moral authority to good effect: Thomas Mann during the war, Grass after the war. At other times, the very things that make a man such as Grass a great novelist—the capacity to turn experience into myth, for example—can be obstacles to cogent political analysis. Grass's role as a moralist and a scold came from the same imagination that created the fictions. But there are certain aspects of the past that should be precisely remembered, as Grass was always the first to point out, in anger, and now, one should hope, in sorrow. ◆

Headline in the Corvallis (Ore.) Gazette-Times.

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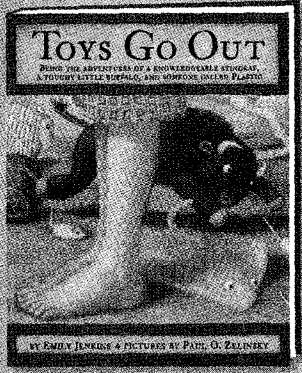
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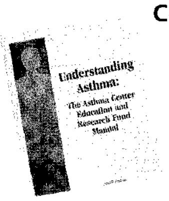

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BOOKS

HUGGER-MUGGER

New novels by John le Carré and Ward Just.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

Hugger-mugger is part of life, especially under modern political conditions. For decades, it had its capital in the Kremlin and the inner councils of Beijing; now it gathers thickly but elusively in the alleys of Baghdad and the mountains of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Many outside the borders of the United States, and many within those borders, place its originating center in Washington, D.C.; there, as Robert Lowell wrote decades ago in his poem "July in Washington," "the stiff spokes of this wheel / touch the sore spots of the earth." John le Carré, the leading fictional dramatizer of the clandestine struggle between the capitalist West and the Communist bloc, maintains a brisk trade in hugger-mugger, searching in each new novel for a fresh locale, a newly sore spot. In "Our Game" (1995), it was the small, mostly Muslim republic of Ingushetia, striving for freedom from Russia, that huge remnant of the defunct Soviet Union; in "The Tailor of Panama" (1996), it was the bedevilled isthmus to our south; in "Single & Single" (1999), the financial underworld of the new Russian states; in "The Constant Gardener" (2000), perfidy in Kenya by the pharmaceutical industry. In "Absolute Friends" (2003), the sore spot became le Carré's fury at the American and British intervention in Iraq. Now, in "The Mission Song" (Little, Brown; $26.99), he has turned to Joseph Conrad's old heart of darkness itself, upriver on the Congo. The genocidal ethnic strife in neighboring Rwanda has spilled over the flagrantly porous eastern borders of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and a murderous mixture of refugee Rwandan *génocidaires*, warlord armies, meddlers from Uganda and Burundi, and mercenaries of many stripes prolongs and complicates a conflict that has claimed, since its commencement, in 1998, four million Congolese lives, most of them women and children, from war-related violence, hunger, and disease. At stake is eastern Congo's mineral wealth—copper, gold, diamonds, uranium, potential oil, and coltan, short for columbite-tantalite, described in "The Mission Song" as "a highly precious metal once found exclusively in the Eastern Congo." The definition, provided by the novel's narrator, colloquially continues, "If you were unwise enough to dismantle your cellphone, you would find an essential speck of it among the debris. For decades the United States has held strategic stockpiles of the stuff, a fact my clients learned to their cost when the Pentagon dumped tons of it on the world market." There's hugger-mugger for you.

Into the miserable chaos of eastern Congo le Carré's imagination projects the Syndicate, a neo-colonial group of capitalist entrepreneurs, headed by one Lord Brinkley and, though ostensibly multinational, English in its visible functionaries; it intends to enlist three leading warlords, colorfully sketched, in a coup that will establish in power, before destabilizing elections take place, a "self-proclaimed Congolese saviour chap, an ex-professor of something," called the Mwangaza. To this purpose—benign, mind you, "democracy at the end of a gun barrel" designed to "give the People a fair slice of the cake for once, and let peace break out," as well as assure the Syndicate its own more than fair slice—a conference is held on a nameless island in a northern sea. An interpreter is needed, and that brings in our narrator, Bruno Salvador, Salvo for short, the Congolese love child of an amorous mission priest of Irish-Norman descent and a village headman's beautiful daughter. She, a few months after giving birth to Salvo, "crept back to her kin and family, who weeks afterwards were massacred in their entirety by an aberrant tribe, right down to my last grandparent, uncle, cousin, distant aunt and half-brother or sister."

Salvo's voice is jaunty, as well it might be, since, thanks to his irregular upbringing in the care of missionaries, he learned not just Swahili and French but Lingala, Bemba, Shi, Kinyarwanda, and sundry other languages of Central Africa. Many of these come into play at the conference, which takes up about half of the novel. The Syndicate hosts plant electronic eavesdropping equipment in their guests' quarters, enriching the hugger-mugger. Salvo later explains it to Lord Brinkley, who seems as much in the dark as he is:

> "The whole island was bugged, sir. Even the gazebo on the hilltop was bugged. Whenever Philip reckoned we'd reached a critical moment in negotiations, he'd call a recess, and I'd dive down to the boiler room and listen in, and relay the gist to Sam upstairs so that Philip and Maxie would be ahead of the game next time we convened. And take advice from the Syndicate and Philip's friends over the satphone when they needed it. Which was how we focussed on Haj. He did. Philip. Well, with Tabizi's help, I suppose. I was the unwitting instrument."

Hugger-mugger takes a lot of explaining, a lot of diagramming. An additional trouble with it, which keeps the suspense thriller, however skillful and polished, a subgenre, is that the novelist, manipulating his human counters on the board, must keep them somewhat blank, with selective disclosure of their inner lives, lest the killer or mole or whatever be prematurely unmasked. Even the most intimate human matters are turned into diagrams. Salvo's love, Hannah (not to be confused with his wife, Penelope), is thus addressed by an Americanized friend, Baptiste:

> "Let's do facts. Here are the facts. Your friend here fucks you, right? Your friend's friend knows he fucks you, so he comes to your friend. And he tells your friend a story, which your friend repeats to you because he's fucking you. You are rightly incensed by this story, so you bring your friend who is fucking you to me, so that he can tell it all over again, which is what your friend's friend reckoned would happen all along. We call that *disinformation*."

Between information and disinformation, characters don't have much breathing room. We like Salvo well enough. He is humorous, for one thing, which is rare in this solemn shadow world of closed mouths and gritted teeth. With his interpreter's ear, he discriminates among varieties of spoken English, from "your Blairite wannabe-classless slur or your high-Tory curdled cockney" to "your Caribbean melody" and "the gone-away vowels" of his late father's Irish brogue. Finding himself thinking licentiously of another female hours after his inaugural orgy with Hannah, he excuses himself with the poetic thought "When Hannah has lit your lamp for you, it's natural to see other women in its rays." The reader in a mild way wants him, married to a faithless and ambitious white journalist, to find happiness with Hannah, an idealistic nurse and fellow-native of eastern Congo. The dandified, French-educated Haj, another such native, calls Salvo a "zebra," and "The Mission Song" neatly resolves for the biracial interpreter the quandary, in his half-English condition, of which stripe to settle on.

Mysterious events from the Congo to the Pyrenees.

LOU BROOKS

But the novel's resolutions, romantic and political, are achieved at an emotional distance, behind a thick protective layer of thriller-awareness and thriller expectations. Le Carré has researched his chosen venue diligently (his acknowledgments thank "Jason Stearns of the International Crisis Group for his unique expertise and guidance during my brief visit to the Eastern Congo") and delivered an entertainment whose foremost passion is a commendable indignation over the sufferings of a large African population at the hands of berserk militias, corrupt if not altogether absent government, and, from the West, cold corporate greed. "The Mission Song" illuminates with animated personifications a portion of the globe's daily misery that tends to be, in American news, at least, murky and abstract. We are pleasantly surprised to learn, in a letter written by Haj to our hero from his flowery estate in Bukavu, on Lake Kivu, that the heart of darkness is not altogether dark: "The Goma cheese is still okay, the lights go out for three hours a day, but nobody puts out the lights on the fishing boats at night."

"Forgetfulness," Ward Just's fifteenth novel (Houghton Mifflin; $25), from its first pages drops the reader into a level deeper than animated news reports, into the wandering mind of a middle-aged Frenchwoman while she lies freezing and disabled by a broken ankle on the darkening slope of a mountain in the Pyrenees. Not that Just, a former war correspondent who has lived in many countries and at present divides his time between Paris and Martha's Vineyard, is unaware of the news: his publisher advertises that the novel "mixes the immediacy of the headlines with the moral and emotional intricacy of a le Carré novel." His immobilized heroine, Florette, who is married to an American painter, Thomas Railles, and lives with him in an Aquitaine village, St. Michel du Valcabrère, at the base of the mountain, allows her thoughts, "blown this way and that," to touch on overheard conversations between Thomas and two old American friends as they excitedly talk politics:

> Capitalism's responsibility for the turbulence of the modern world, its heedlessness and chaos, its savagery, its utter self-absorption, capitalism the canary in the mineshaft. But it's what we have, isn't it? No turning the clocks back. Against the jihadists, we have capitalism. Will money trump faith?

It is Florette's misfortune, on a walk undertaken to get away for an hour from the conversation of these men, not only to have broken her ankle but to have fallen into the hands of four strangers, "dubious men who did not belong here." For a time, they carry her, with difficulty, down the slick, winding trail in a handy stretcher but, as darkness closes in and snowflakes begin to fall, they change their minds, put her down on the cold ground, and, smoking many Gitanes, debate their situation in their inscrutable language. The author gives not only her interior monologue but some of the thoughts of the men as well—"None of this—the weather, their slow progress—was to their advantage. The rescue of the . . . woman was an error and they would pay for it." While Florette speculates, dozes, and dreamily entertains memories, the reality of her worsening situation bears down upon the reader. Her mind keeps touching on the fact that she needs to pee, and when, as she euphorically pictures her rescue by Thomas and the villagers, her bladder lets go—"She peed and peed some more, such a strange sensation lying on her back but so welcome"—the release signals an end. It is a terrific scene, and Just's novel throughout, as it wanders and even maunders, has the electric potential of being terrific, with the kind of terrific that sneaks up out of the mundane. Compared with le Carré's, its slower, thicker prose seeks to drag visceral recognitions from us, keeping us alert and tense.

The fatal mountain, its lower slopes continuous with the Railleses' back yard, is called Big Papa, and Hemingway's influence on Just is hard to miss. The flatly declarative tone, both burnt-out and faintly pugnacious, has sudden recourse to the second person, like a jabbing finger: "Thomas . . . tried to remember the exact spot on the mountain where they had had their picnic but he could not; it was so long ago and all mountains looked the same when you were on them." Clauses are strung together bluntly, without fear of contradiction: "The mountain would always be in his vision when he was working unless he chose to turn his easel to the wall, and still he would be unable to forget, and he was a man who forgot things all the time." Thomas shares Hemingway's café vision of Europe, a sense that the restless American search for a good place finds its ease here:

> Thomas ordered a glass of wine and a dozen oysters and sat back to collect his thoughts. But he was unable to gather them coherently so he contented himself watching the show, the bar arguments and laughter and the young lovers at the corner table who were making plans for the evening. His attention was noticed because the young woman caught Thomas's eye and winked; he tipped a glass in her direction. The *patron* continued to pull the porcelain handles, glass after glass.

Yet an American cozy in Paris is still an alien, and "Forgetfulness" strikes the theme of aliens early and often. The pain in Florette's leg is "migrating, an unwelcome undocumented alien." She is an alien in the realm of the mountain gods, who are "especially vengeful toward women who invaded their domain, careless uninvited intruders who did not know their rightful place in the world." The leader of her halfhearted rescuers, with his soft, coarse voice, reminds her of her crazily brutal father, of whom her mother explained, "He is an alien." North Africans in Europe, Hispanics in Thomas's once German-dominated home town of LaBarre, Wisconsin, Slovenian bears imported to replace the extinct bears of the Pyrenees, solitary Englishmen in remotest France, like Thomas's hundred-and-six-year-old neighbor St. John Granger—all are aliens. St. John Granger's great-niece, come from Pennsylvania to collect her inheritance, says to Thomas pointedly, "I have never understood people who choose to live outside their own country. Why is it important to them to live among strangers, speaking a foreign tongue, eternally on the outside of things. Who do they think they're kidding? It's like trying to escape your own shadow, except every time you look over your shoulder it's there." Thomas (whose career in portraiture specializes in strangers: "Strangers were his métier, fifteen minutes' acquaintance and a series of snapshots all he required") spends the novel looking over the shoulder at his past, with substantial doses of alcohol to clarify the view.

"Forgetfulness" is a portrait of loss and grief, as not only Thomas's wife disappears but his two boyhood buddies from LaBarre, Russ Conlon and Bernhard Sindelar, cease to be vital presences in his life. He drifts irresolutely to America, where he rents a small house on a Maine island attached to the mainland by an irregular ferry. When Bernhard visits him, it is as an alien from a distasteful world of hugger-mugger: he has become the managing director of a security firm that supplies "ex-Special Forces, ex-SAS, ex-Foreign Legion, ex-Wehrmacht, ex-cops, ex-Chicago goons, Los Angeles shamuses" to whoever can pay for them. Bernhard and Russ both, after college, were recruited by the government for overseas intelligence work, as NOCs, under "non-official cover." From their feast of clandestine activity, they sometimes let fall crumbs, "odd jobs"—"the small change of snooping"—in Thomas's way; the roving painter found the work congenial, "the technique similar to portraiture, slipping into an alter ego," but the enchantment has long worn off. To Bernhard, espionage work was "coherence," a calling; "only chaos was inadmissible." While still in government service, he availed himself of French contacts to locate the four men who carried Florette halfway down Big Papa, and he invites Thomas to witness their interrogation in Le Havre. Here the reader, looking with the painter through the two-way mirror, becomes an alien, in the unfamiliar world of officially condoned torture, the vigorously applied leather bastinado and the cruelly languid inquisition:

> So, the Frenchman repeated, his voice light, almost cheerful. He turned his head to look at the clock . . . and Thomas noticed that it read five. The Frenchman looked at it for a minute or more, giving the impression that time was infinite. . . . Now he lowered his eyes to the file and began to read once again, except his posture was confidential, an attitude approaching intimacy. He had put his foot on the chair, leaning forward with the file in his thick hands, wetting his thumb again and again as he turned the mysterious pages.

Mysterious also is the liking that the inquisitor, Antoine, takes to surly Thomas, and the permission he grants him to spend two hours alone with the head suspect, a terrorist or smuggler who at last confirms, from his own angle, what we have already seen from Florette's. After this anticlimax of a climactic encounter, the novel and its hero's actions subside into incoherence: "He had lost the rhyme and melody of feelings. . . . Thomas believed he had made a mistake in Le Havre but he didn't know what it was. He imagined the mistake was some form of Lebenslüge. But what was the lie that allowed him to live? He wondered if the lie was his refusal to have blood on his hands. So the interrogation at Le Havre, too, was unresolved and marked by doubt."

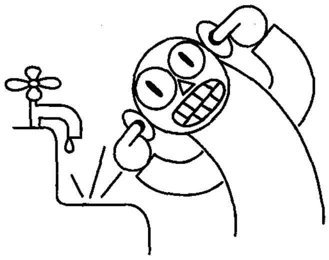
Numerous threads are tugged—Thomas drinks more and has taken up smoking again; his doctor warns him he is headed for heart trouble; he walks the two miles from the village to his home in a cataclysmic thunderstorm and is blown into a ditch; he has farewell drinks with Granger's pro-Bush heir and her cell-phone-addicted husband, who have sold the house; he returns to America for the first time in ten years; he visits LaBarre, finds his family's house and everyone he knew gone, and is advised to get out of town; he spends time in New York with Russ, who has turned to writing short stories—but none of these threads pull Just's wide weave of incident and rumination tight. There are reverberant, dead-on patches of writing—the interrogation; the thunderstorm; riffs on billiards and churches and old jazz records and Billie Holiday; Thomas's memories of small-town life and of his father, a chain-smoking doctor, and of his first model and passionate lover, Karen, and his first New York show, where his churchly mother met Karen nude on canvas and in the tipsy flesh—but what Thomas makes of his retrospect and intends to do with the rest of his life is left in the Maine fog. The reader at this point could use a little of le Carré's well-crafted intricacy and tidy professional closure. Ward Just and his hero just fade away, somewhat like the Washington masters of hugger-mugger when jargon-prone Bernhard returns for a conference, "a general review of current operations with special attention to methods and sources, connecting dots while they walked back the cat, a dispirited and dispiriting exercise. Morale was terrible, the fudge factory's bureaucracy nervously broken down without energy enough for rebellion. Congress was asniff, the Pentagon frightened, and the White House in deep prayer." Well, such is life when hugger-mugger palls. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Minor Classics

Reading Writing, *by Julien Gracq, translated from the French by Jeanine Herman (Turtle Point; $17.50).* Greatly respected for his early novels and criticism, Gracq seems to have done his utmost to eschew conventional acclaim. He refused the Prix Goncourt in 1951, published little, and, now in his mid-nineties, lives in the small Loire town where he was born. This volume, published in France in 1980, is a series of thoughts on literary matters loosely grouped under subject headings. Many entries are no more than a few lines long, but Gracq's highly personal style and his wide and thoughtful reading make for memorable observations—Céline is "a man who started marching behind his own bugle." The book is an engaging antidote to what Gracq sees as a problem with literary criticism: "A book that has seduced me is like a woman who places me under her spell: to hell with her ancestors, birthplace, background, relationships, education, and childhood friends!"

Every Eye, *by Isobel English (Black Sparrow/David R. Godine; $23.95).* Hatty, the narrator of this exquisite 1956 novel, is a piano teacher who was born with a lazy eye. Though her vision has been repaired, a lingering feeling of isolation makes it seem that "this outward sign was only the visible proof of inward impediment." Hatty's voice on the page vividly conveys her sense of "discordancy" with others, as the action shifts between recollections of adolescence and young-adulthood in grim, gray England and her considerably cheerier present, travelling through a Technicolor Spain with a new, much younger husband. The true marvel of the novel lies in the taut interweaving of these narratives: past informing present and present recasting past. Enlightenment is kept satisfyingly in abeyance until a rapturous conclusion on a mountaintop in Ibiza.



The Galosh, *by Mikhail Zoshchenko, translated from the Russian by Jeremy Hicks (Overlook; $24.95).* Though little known to English readers, Zoshchenko was one of the most popular writers in early Soviet Russia—a time when, as Hicks explains in a useful introduction to this collection of brief comic tales, satire was not yet prohibited by the authorities. Describing himself as "a temporary substitute for the proletarian writer," Zoshchenko wrote in a deliberately simple style, filling his pages with corrupt officials, petty thieves, and confused bureaucrats. Hicks's fine translations overcome tricky problems—one dénouement involves "Paris" being misread as a word written in Cyrillic—and successfully capture Zoshchenko's knockabout use of everyday speech. Zoshchenko brought out the latent comedy of people's adaptation to new ways. In one story, the electrification of an apartment building upsets residents who previously, thanks to the gloom, had not been able to see the squalor in which they lived.

The Heart to Artemis, *by Bryher (Paris Press; $19.95).* Bryher was born Annie Winifred Ellerman in the repressive world of Victorian England, where, as she says in this wide-ranging memoir, "an invitation to tea was a sacred obligation." At an early age, she vowed to "break the unhealthy taboos of the nineteenth century," and, as the lover of the poet H.D., she became familiar with most of Parisian café society—she claims they thought her a "bore" because she didn't drink. Never afraid to get her hands dirty, she rode donkeys in Egypt, climbed mountains in a skirt, changed the hot and messy carbons in lights on early movie sets, flew airplanes, and helped people escape from Nazi Germany. Bryher's reputation as a writer rests on her postwar historical novels, but this portrait of a tumultuous era shows her passionate involvement in the present.

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

INESCAPABLE PASTS

"The Black Dahlia" and "The Ground Truth."

BY DAVID DENBY

New York, rising high, eliminates its past with a wrecking ball; Los Angeles, spreading out, broods over its history until it rots. Events from decades ago—a famous murder, a Hollywood scandal, a corrupt real-estate deal—serve as the basis of L.A. novels and screenplays, and the movies made from these fictions become part of the city's sense of itself, and that, in turn, gets fed into new novels, screenplays, and journalism. A documentary on this subject, from 2004, was called "Los Angeles Plays Itself." Yes, and plays itself with decreasing vitality. Imitation and pastiche come easily to a photographic medium, and films set in Los Angeles are often garlanded with stylistic flourishes from earlier L.A. movies. Brian De Palma's period re-creation, "The Black Dahlia," suffers from this rampant allusiveness. The picture is a kind of fattened goose that's been stuffed with goose-liver pâté. It's overrich and fundamentally unsatisfying.

In 1947, a young woman named Elizabeth Short, drawn to the city by the hope of a career in the movies, was murdered in a particularly horrible way—first tortured, then killed, then mutilated, her body sliced in two. The crime has found its way into many books, including "The Black Dahlia" (1987), by James Ellroy, who brought his own cargo-hold of L.A. baggage to the subject. In 1958, when Ellroy was ten, his mother, Geneva Hilliker, was raped and murdered. The boy understandably became obsessed with her death, but then the adult Ellroy, not so understandably—that is, operating as only a writer of crime fiction would—channelled the emotions generated by his mother's murder into a retelling of the Betty Short story. Ellroy's "Black Dahlia" and the De Palma movie based on it are both the spawn of the Los Angeles recycling industry—an amalgam of actual events, Raymond Chandler novels, and earlier movies. As in so much L.A. crime fiction, the root cause of the murder is not simply personal vengeance or rage but some ancient fraud in the city's history, a dirty deal that has deepened into a malaise. This sense of systematic corruption can work beautifully. In the classic "Chinatown," a wealthy entrepreneur's corralling of the city's water supply eventually produces a dead body—a man discovered drowned in an empty reservoir—and by the end of the movie past and present lock together like the two halves of a bridge. But the squalid manipulations leading to Betty Short's death—timbers from old movie sets reused to build cheap, unsafe housing, and a clandestine trade in stag films—are mentioned in this movie only in passing; they come off as gaudy examples of Hollywood self-absorption and self-loathing.

Josh Hartnett and Scarlett Johansson in Brian De Palma's new movie.

The screenwriter Brian Helgeland, working with the director Curtis Hanson, shrewdly thinned out Ellroy's material for the adaptation of "L.A. Confidential." But De Palma's screenwriter, Josh Friedman, shovels chunks of intricate, undigested Ellroy into the movie. The hero, an honest cop, Dwight Bleichert (Josh Hartnett), toiling at the edges of the tangled mess, is propelled into situations he doesn't understand. Violence erupts for no apparent reason. A woman goes to bed with him, but is it just sex that she wants? Someone starts talking wildly, and pieces of the past spill out like an overturned basket of tennis balls. We're often baffled, and after a while enjoyable puzzlement gives way to irritation and resistance. Like the hero of so many noir films, Josh Hartnett does a voice-over narration, but he has to speak Ellroy's worked-up version of forties police jargon, and the events he refers to don't mean much to us. The lithe, sweet-faced Hartnett looks nothing like a cop, but I get the point of the casting—he's meant to be the only one in the movie untouched by experience. Still, he doesn't come through: innocence, if it's placed at the center of a movie, has to fascinate us in some way or other, and Hartnett doesn't have a rich enough temperament to hold the picture together.

The other characters shrug Dwight off. He can't get a straight answer out of his partner, Lee Blanchard (Aaron Eckhart), a restless, almost spasmodically violent detective; and Dwight is enticed and mystified by Lee's on-again, off-again lover, Kay (Scarlett Johansson), a rueful blonde who sits at home all day smoking and brooding. Johansson, in a

TOM BACHTELL

sweater, her hair up, is slight but lushly sensual, a kind of baby Lana Turner. We know that the filmmakers are teasing our memories of forties bad girls, but the homage slides into contempt. Hilary Swank, her mouth twisted with desire, plays a lecherous, lying, raven-haired heiress—a much more promiscuous version of the two sisters in "The Big Sleep." The Irish actress Fiona Shaw turns up, lurching into the frame like Gloria Swanson in "Sunset Boulevard," and she's so far over the top she just seems ludicrous. The actor who works most effectively in the movie is Mia Kirshner, as Betty—a slender, frightened girl glimpsed in screen tests, desperately eager to please.

There are scenes that display De Palma's customary visual brilliance: two bodies fall down a stairwell in agonizing slow motion; the sloping old black cars slide along lurid streets like giant shiny beetles. But the movie is so complicated, the narrative so awkward, that when the pieces of the puzzle fall into place we get no tingle of satisfaction. The effect is less dramatic than diagrammatic—character A slept with character B twenty years earlier, and oh, yes, all of that connects to crimes X, Y, and Z. Will this sinister Los Angeles diddling ever come to an end? In 2003, Steve Hodel, a retired L.A.P.D. homicide detective, published a book in which he claimed that his father was Betty Short's murderer. In August, New Line Cinema bought Hodel's book, and now it, too, may become a movie.

"I don't know that I can let go of it, or that I can let myself off the hook," Sean Huze, a Marine corporal, says of his time in Iraq. "Maybe I shouldn't be let off the hook." Huze, I would guess, is not a man normally given to masochistic remarks. An actor (and now a playwright), he volunteered for service on September 12, 2001, in a surge of patriotic fervor. Even now, sobered by his tour of duty, he has a cocky way of staring at the camera which suggests considerable self-awareness and ego. His remarks come near the end of Patricia Foulkrod's documentary "The Ground Truth," an upsetting but mesmerizing series of interviews with veterans of the Iraq war. Huze is plagued by memories of civilians killed by American fire, particularly children. Rob Sarra, another marine, suffers in the same way. He shot an Iraqi woman as she was approaching an armored vehicle, only to realize, as she fell, that she was trying to pull a white cloth out of her bag. "If I become a Muslim, if I read the Koran every day, I cannot bring back that woman," he says. Huze, Sarra, and many of the other interview subjects suffer from "intrusive thoughts," as a psychological counsellor describes them, which is one of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Putting it in an older language, they suffer from an inability to expiate crimes that they think they have committed. It wouldn't be enough to tell them that they were no more than cogs in a war machine, and that terrible things happen in every war. They want to take responsibility for the human cost of this war in a way that the Bush Administration will not. Yet if expiation is impossible, penance is not: they can talk. This confessional movie is the vets' spiritual claim on sanity.

"The Ground Truth" is not a "balanced" film. Patricia Foulkrod, a veteran director and producer of documentaries, didn't interview anyone proud of his or her service in Iraq. She is making a case—that the Defense Department sent servicemen and women to Iraq on an ill-defined, ill-equipped mission, without a plan, or any clear sense of who the enemy was, and then, when they got out, abandoned them, with the result that they are all maimed in one way or another. There's rage in Foulkrod's indictment, though what we hear from the vets is more like lucid disappointment. When they return, one of them says, everyone calls them heroes, yet no one wants to hear what they have to say. This group doesn't want to be shunted aside like the Vietnam vets, many of whom were tainted by an aura of failure as well as by their own memories and troubles.

Foulkrod cuts the recollections and ruminations into fragments and then reassembles them into chronological stages: recruitment, boot camp, combat, return, followed by the long dismaying coda in which the men and women struggle not to fall apart. As she shifts from one vet to another, there are moving bits of testimony, but the abrupt editing leaves anecdotes hanging. We want to hold on to such people as Chad Reiber, an ex-Army Ranger, who sorrowfully describes himself nearly blowing someone's head off at a party. We want to see Reiber's entire story—to know how the parts of his life at home fit, or don't fit, together. "The Ground Truth" is an emotionally potent work, but the great study of an Iraq vet, in either documentary or fictional form, has yet to be made. ♦

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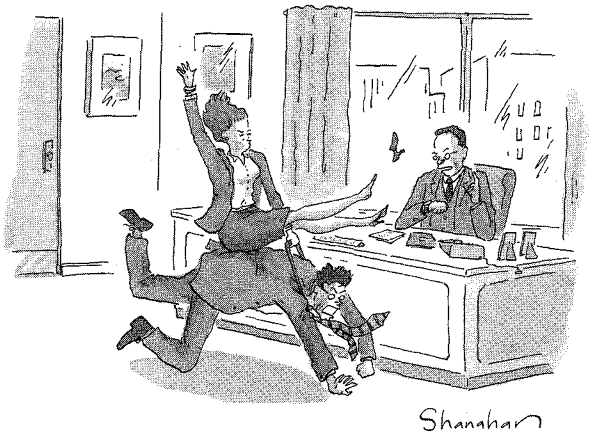
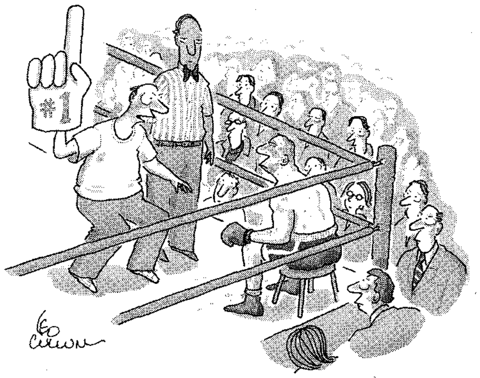
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Victoria Roberts, must be received by Sunday, September 17th. Finalists in the September 4th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the October 2nd issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"O.K., let's wrap up and call it a day. I feel like we're losing our focus."
Walker Robb, Seattle, Wash.



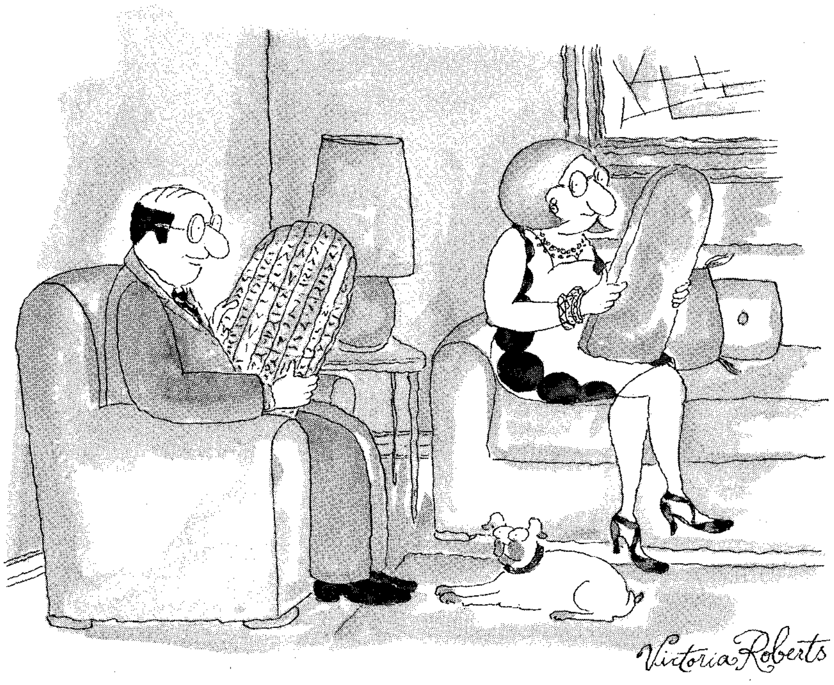
THE FINALISTS

"Two? Close enough—give 'em hell!"
Marcia Kaufman, Natick, Mass.

"You've made me regret my purchase."
Eric Pinkela, San Ramon, Calif.

"O.K., good. Now, who's the Deputy Secretary of Agriculture?"
Harry Beller, Pleasanton, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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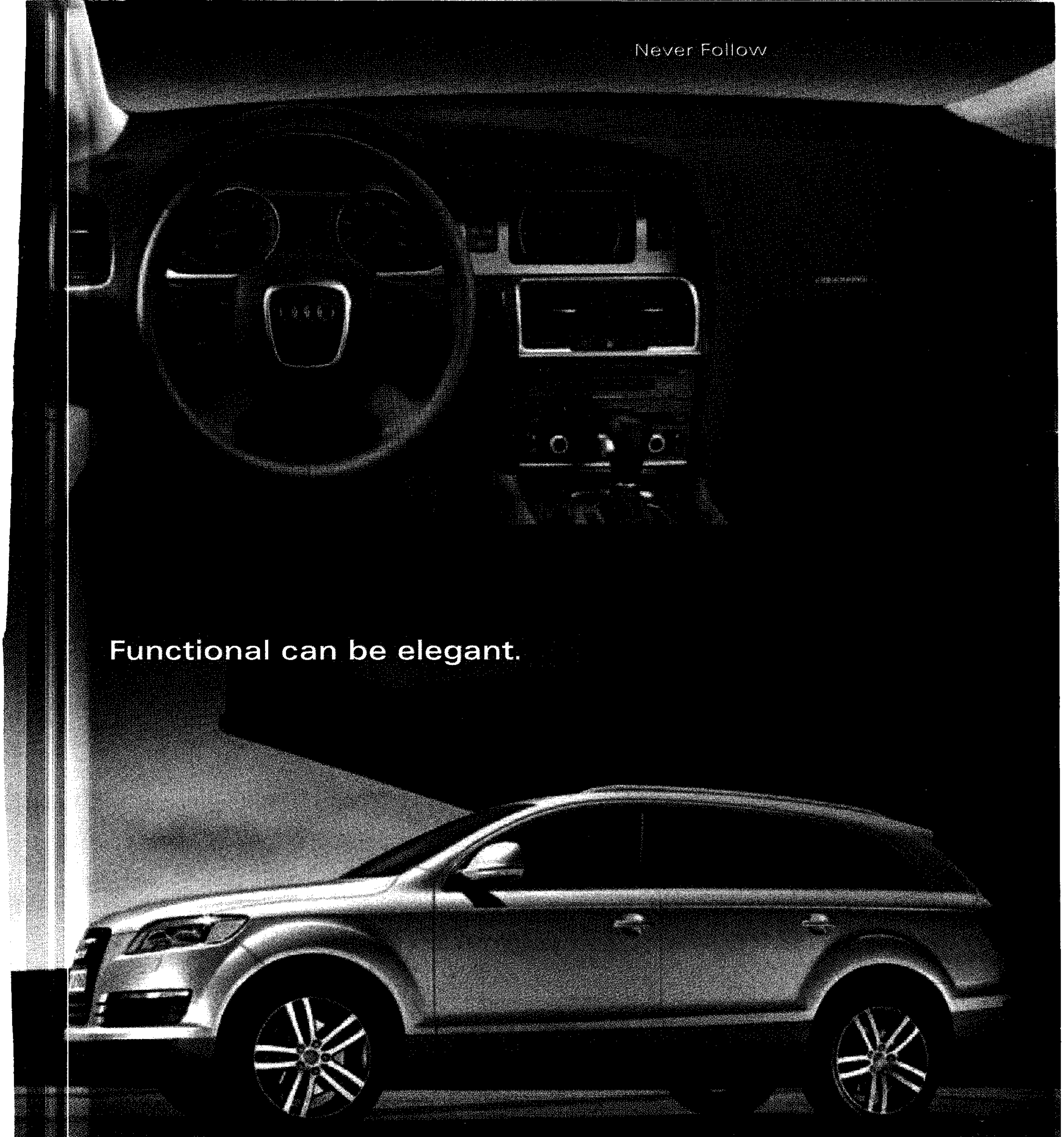

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